THE LOVES OF PELLEAS
AND ETARRE
ZONA GALE

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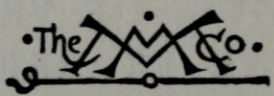
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THE LOVES OF PELLEAS AND ETARRE

BY

ZONA GALE

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To

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

THE author hereby acknowledges the courtesy of the publishers of *Appleton's Magazine*, *The Cosmopolitan Magazine*, *The Delineator*, *Everybody's Magazine*, *The Outlook*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Smart Set*, and *The Woman's Home Companion*, in permitting the reprint here of the stories that originally appeared in their pages.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	The Odour of the Ointment	1
II.	The Matinée	27
III.	The Path of In-the-Spring	45
IV.	The Elopement	72
V.	The Dance	93
VI.	The Honeymoon	115
VII.	The Other Two	134
VIII.	A Fountain of Gardens	148
IX.	The Baby	171
X.	The Marriage of Katinka	190
XI.	The Christening	208
XII.	An Interlude	229
XIII.	The Return of Endymion	246
XIV.	The Golden Wedding	265
XV.	The Wedding	291
XVI.	"So the Carpenter encouraged the Goldsmith"	312
XVII.	Christmas Roses	336

The Loves of Pelleas and Etarre

I

THE ODOUR OF THE OINTMENT

Ascension lilies were everywhere in our shabby drawing-room. They crowded two tables and filled a corner and rose, slim and white, atop a Sheraton cabinet. Every one had sent Pelleas and me a sheaf of the flowers — the Chartres, the Cleatams, Miss Willie Lillieblade, Enid, Lisa and dear Hobart Eddy had all remembered us on Easter eve, and we entered our drawing-room after breakfast on Easter morning to be all but greeted with a winding of the white trumpets. The sun smote them and they were a kind of candle, their light secretly diffused, premonitory of Spring, of some resurrection of light as a new element. It was a wonderful Easter day, and in spite of our sad gray hair Pelleas and I were never in fairer health; yet for the first time in our fifty years together Easter found us close prisoners.

Easter morning, and we were forbidden to leave the house!

"Etarre," Pelleas said, with some show of firmness, "there is no reason in the world why we should not go."

"Ah, well now," I said with a sigh, "I wish you could prove that to Nichola. Do I not know it perfectly already?"

It is one sign of our advancing years, we must suppose, that we are prone to predicate of each other the trifles which heaven sends. The sterner things we long ago learned to accept with our hands clasped in each other's; but when the postman is late or the hot water is cold or we miss our paper we have a way of looking solemnly sidewise.

We had gone upstairs the night before in the best of humours, Pelleas carrying an Ascension lily to stand in the moonlight of our window, for it always seems to us the saddest injustice to set the sullen extinguisher of lowered lights on the brief life of a flower. And we had been looking forward happily to Easter morning when the service is always inseparable from a festival of Spring. Then, lo! when we were awakened there was the treacherous world one glitter of ice. Branches sparkled against the blue, the wall of the park was a rampart of silver and the faithless sidewalks were mockeries of thoroughfare. But the grave significance of this did not come to us

until Nichola entered the dining-room with the griddle-cakes and found me dressed in my gray silk and Pelleas in broadcloth.

"Is it," asked our old serving-woman, who rules us as if she had brought us from Italy and we had not, more than forty years before, tempted her from her native Capri, "is it that you are mad, with this ice everywhere, everywhere?"

"It is Easter morning, Nichola," I said, with the mildness of one who supports a perfect cause.

"Our Lady knows it is so," Nichola said, setting down her smoking burden, "but the streets are so thick with ice that one breaks one's head a thousand times. You must not think of so much as stepping in the ar-y."

She left the room, and the honey-brown cakes cooled while Pelleas and I looked at each other aghast. To miss our Easter service for the first time in our life together! The thought was hardly to be borne. We reasoned with Nichola when she came back and I think that Pelleas even stamped his foot under the table; but she only brought more cakes and shook her head, the impertinent old woman who has conceived that she must take care of us.

"One breaks one's head a thousand times," she obstinately repeated. "Our Lady would not wish it. Danger is not holy."

To tell the truth, as Pelleas and I looked sorrow-

fully from the window above the Ascension lilies we knew that there was reason in the situation, for the streets were perilous even to see. None the less we were frankly resentful, for it is bad enough to have a disagreeable matter occur without having reason on its side. As for our carriage, that went long ago together with the days when Pelleas could model and I could write so that a few were deceived; and as for a cab to our far downtown church and back, that was not to be considered. For several years now we have stepped, as Nichola would say, softly, softly from one security to another so that we need not give up our house; and even now we are seldom sure that one month's comfort will keep its troth with the next. Since it was too icy to walk to the car we must needs remain where we were.

"I suppose," said I, as if it were a matter of opinion, "that it is really Easter uptown too. But some way —"

"I know," Pelleas said. Really, of all the pleasures of this world I think that the "I know" of Pelleas in answer to something I have left unsaid is the last to be foregone. I hope that there is no one who does not have this delight.

"Pelleas —" I began tremblingly to suggest.

"Ah, well now," Pelleas cried, resolutely, "let us go anyway. We can walk beside the curb slowly. And after all, we do not belong to Nichola." Really,

of all the pleasures of this world I think that the daring of Pelleas in moments when I am cowardly is quite the last to be renounced. I hope that there is no one who has not the delight of living near some one a bit braver than himself.

With one accord we slipped from the drawing-room and toiled up the stairs. I think, although we would not for the world have said so, that there may have been in our minds the fear that this might be our last Easter together and, if it was to be so, then to run away to Easter service would be a fitting memory, a little delicious human thing to recall among austerer glories. Out of its box in a twinkling came my violet bonnet and I hardly looked in a mirror as I put it on. I fastened my cloak wrong from top to bottom and seized two right-hand gloves and thrust them in my muff. Then we opened the door and listened. There was not a sound in the house. We ventured into the passage and down the stairs, and I think we did not breathe until the outer door closed softly upon us. For Nichola, we have come to believe, is a mystic and thinks other people's thoughts. At all events, she finds us out so often that we prefer to theorize that it is her penetration and not our clumsiness which betrays us.

Nichola had already swept the steps with hot water and salt and ashes and sawdust combined; Nichola is so thorough that I am astonished she has not

corrupted me with the quality. Yet no sooner was I beyond the pale of her friendly care than I overestimated thoroughness, like the weak character that I am, and wished that the whole street had practiced it. I took three steps on that icy surface and stood still, desperately.

"Pelleas," I said, weakly, "I feel — I feel like a little nut on top of a big, frosted, indigestible cake."

I laughed a bit hysterically and Pelleas slipped my arm more firmly in his and we crept forward like the hands of a clock, Pelleas a little the faster, as became the tall minute hand. We turned the corner safely and had one interminable block to traverse before we reached the haven of the car. I looked down that long expanse of slippery gray, unbroken save where a divine janitor or two had interposed, and my courage failed me. And Pelleas rashly ventured on advice.

"You walk too stiffly, Etarre," he explained. "Relax, relax! Step along slowly but easily, as I do. Then, if you fall, you fall like a child — no jar, no shock, no broken bones. Now relax —"

And Pelleas did so. Before I could shape my answer Pelleas had relaxed. He lay in a limp little heap on the ice beside me, and I shall never forget my moment of despair.

I do not know where she came from, but while I stood there hopelessly reiterating, "Pelleas—why,

Pelleas!" on the verge of tears, she stepped from some door of the air to my assistance. She wore a little crimson hat and a crimson collar, but her poor coat, I afterward noted, was sadly worn. At the moment of her coming it was her clear, pale face that fixed itself in my grateful memory. She darted forward, stepped down from the curb and held out two hands to Pelleas.

"Oh, sir," she said, "I can help you. I have on rubber boots."

Surely no interfering goddess ever arrived in a more practical frame of mind.

When Pelleas was on his feet, looking about him in a dazed and rather unforgiving fashion, the little maid caught off her crimson muffler and brushed his coat. Pelleas, with bared head, made her as courtly a bow as his foothold permitted, and she continued to stand somewhat shyly before us with the prettiest anxiety on her face, shaking the snow from her crimson muffler.

"You are not hurt, sir?" she asked, and seemed so vastly relieved at his reassurance that she quite won our hearts. "Now," she said, "won't you let me walk with you? My rubber boots will do for all three."

We each accepted her arm without the smallest protest. I will hazard that no shipwrecked sailor ever inquired of the rescuing sail whether he was

inconveniencing it. Once safely aboard, however, and well under way, he may have symbolized his breeding to the extent of offering a faint, polite resistance.

As "Shall we not be putting you out?" Pelleas inquired, never offering to release her arm.

And "I'm afraid we are," I ventured, pressing to her all the closer. She was frail as I, too, and it was not the rubber boots to which I pinned my faith; she was young, and you can hardly know what safety that bespeaks until you are seventy, on ice.

"It's just there, on the south corner of the avenue," Pelleas explained apologetically, and for the first time I perceived that by common consent we had turned back toward home. But neither of us mentioned that.

Then, as we stepped forward, with beautiful nicety rounding the corner to come upon our entrance, suddenly, without a moment's warning, our blackest fears were fulfilled. We ran full upon Nichola.

"Ah, I told you, Pelleas!" I murmured; which I had not, but one has to take some comfort in crises.

Without a word Nichola wheeled solemnly, grasped my other arm and made herself fourth in our singular party. Her gray head was unprotected and her hair stood out all about it. She had thrown her apron across her shoulders and great patches in her print

gown were visible to all the world. When Nichola's sleeves wear out she always cuts a piece from the front breadth of her skirt to mend them, trusting to her aprons to conceal the lack. She was a sorry old figure indeed, out there on the avenue in the Easter sunshine, and I inclined bitterly to resent her interference.

"Nichola," said I, haughtily, "one would think that we were obliged to be wheeled about on casters."

Nichola made but brief reply.

"Our Lady knows you'd be better so," she said.

So that was how, on Easter morning, with the bells pealing like a softer silver across the silver of the city, Pelleas and I found ourselves back in our lonely drawing-room considerably shaken and hovering before the fire which Nichola stirred to a leaping blaze. And with us, since we had insisted on her coming, was our new little friend, fluttering about us with the prettiest concern, taking away my cloak, untying my bonnet and wheeling an arm-chair for Pelleas, quite as if she were the responsible little hostess and we her upset guests. Presently, the bright hat and worn coat laid aside, she sat on a hassock before the blaze and looked up at us, like a little finch that had alighted at our casement and had been coaxed within. I think that I love best these little bird-women whom one expects at any moment to hear thrilling with a lilt of unreasonable song.

"My dear," said I, on a sudden, "how selfish of us. I dare say you will have been going to church?"

She hesitated briefly.

"I might 'a' gone to the mission," she explained, unaccountably colouring, "but I don't know if I would. On Easter."

"But I should have thought," I cried, "that this is the day of days to go."

"It would be," she assented, "it would be —" she went on, hesitating, "but, ma'am, I can't bear to go," she burst out, "because they don't have no flowers. We go to the mission," she added, "and not to the grand churches. And it seems — it seems — don't you think God must be where the most flowers are? An' last Easter we only had one geranium."

Bless the child. I must be a kind of pagan, for I understood.

"Your flowers are beau-tiful," she said, shyly, with a breath of content. "Are they real? I've been wantin' to ask you. I never saw so many without the glass in front. But they don't smell much," she added, wistfully; "I wonder why that is?"

Pelleas and I had been wondering that very morning. They looked so sweet-scented and yet were barren of fragrance; and we had told ourselves that perhaps they were lilies of symbol without

mission or message beyond the symbol, without hue or passion or, so to say, experience.

"Perhaps if one were to make some one happy with them or to put them in a bride's bouquet they would no longer be scentless," Pelleas quaintly said.

But now my mind was busy with other problems than those of such fragrance.

"Where do you go to church, my dear?" I asked, not daring to glance at Pelleas.

"To the mission," she said, "over —" and she named one of the poorest of the struggling East Side chapels. "It's just started," she explained, "an' the lady that give most, she died, and the money don't come. And poor Mr. Lovelow, he's the minister and he's sick — but he preaches, anyhow. And pretty near nobody comes to hear him," she added, with a curious, half-defiant emotion, her cheeks still glowing. It was strange that I who am such a busybody of romance was so slow to comprehend that betraying colour.

Pelleas and I knew where the mission was. We had even peeped into it one Sunday when, though it was not quite finished, they were trying to hold service from the unpainted pulpit. I remembered the ugly walls covered with the lead-pencil calculations of the builders, the forlorn reed organ, the pushing feet upon the floor. And now "the lady who give most" had died.

"Last Easter," our little friend was reiterating, "we had one geranium that the minister brought. But now his mother is dead and I guess he won't be keeping plants. Men always lets 'em freeze. Mis' Sledge, she's got a cactus, but it hasn't bloomed yet. Maybe she'll take that. And they said they was going to hang up the letters left from last Christmas, for the green. They don't say nothing but 'Welcome' and 'Star of Bethlehem,' but I s'pose the 'Welcome' is always nice for a church, and I s'pose the star shines all year round, if you look. But they don't much of anybody come. Mr. Lovelow, he's too sick to visit round much. Last Sunday they was only 'leven in the whole room."

"Only 'leven in the whole room." It hardly seemed credible in New York. But I knew the poverty of some of the smaller missions, especially in a case where "the lady that give most" has died. And this poor young minister, this young Mr. Lovelow whose mother had died and who was too sick to "visit round much," and doubtless had an indifferent, poverty-ridden parish which no other pastor wanted — I knew in an instant the whole story of the struggle. I looked over at our pots of Ascension lilies and I found myself unreasonably angry with the dear Cleatams and Chartres and Hobart Eddy and the rest for the self-indulgence of having given them to us.

At that moment my eyes met those of Pelleas. He was leaning forward, looking at me with an expression of both daring, and doubt of my approval, and I saw his eyes go swiftly to the lilies. What was he contriving, I wondered, my heart beating. He was surely not thinking of sending our lilies over to the mission, for we could never get them all there in time and Nichola —

"Etarre!" said Pelleas — and showed me in a moment heights of resourcefulness to which I can never attain — "Etarre! It is only half after ten. We can't go out to service — and the mission is not four blocks from us. Why not have our little friend run over there and, if there are only two dozen or so in the chapel, have that young Mr. Lovelow bring them all over here, and let it be Easter in this room?"

He waved his hand toward the lilies waiting there all about the walls and doing no good to any save a selfish old man and woman. He looked at me, almost abashed at his own impulse. Was ever such a practical Mahomet, proposing to bring to himself some Mountain Delectable?

"Do you mean," I asked breathlessly, "to let them have services in this —"

"Here with us, in the drawing-room," Pelleas explained. "Why not? There were fifty in the room for that Lenten morning musicale. There's the piano for the music. And the lilies — the lilies —"

"Of course we will," I cried. "But, O, will they come? Do you think they will come?"

I turned to our little friend, and she had risen and was waiting with shining eyes.

"O, ma'am," she said, trembling, "why, ma'am! O, yes'm, they'll come. I'll get 'em here myself. O, Mr. Lovelow, he'll be so glad . . ."

She flew to her bright hat and worn coat and crimson muffler.

"Mr. Lovelow says," she cried, "that a shabby church is just as much a holy temple as the ark of the gover'ment — but he was so glad when we dyed the spread for the orgin — O, ma'am," she broke off, knotting the crimson scarf about her throat, "do you really want 'em? They ain't — you know they don't look —"

"Hurry, child," said Pelleas, "and mind you don't let one of them escape!"

When she was gone we looked at each other in panic.

"Pelleas," I cried, trembling, "think of all there is to be done in ten minutes."

Pelleas brushed this aside as a mere straw in the wind.

"Think of Nichola," he portentously amended.

In all our flurry we could not help laughing at the frenzy of our old servant when we told her. Old Nichola was born upon the other side of every ar-

gument. In her we can see the history of all the world working out in a miniature of wrinkles. For Nichola would have cut off her gray hair with Sparta, hurled herself fanatically abroad on St. Bartholomew's day, borne a pike before the Bastile, broken and burned the first threshing-machine in England, stoned Luther, and helped to sew the stars upon striped cloth in the kitchen of Betsy Ross.

"For the love of heaven," cried Nichola, "church in the best room! It is not holy. Whoever heard o' church in a private house, like a spiritualist see-once or whatever they are. An' me with a sponge-cake in the oven," she concluded fervently. "Heaven be helpful, mem, I wish't you'd 'a' went to church yourselves."

Chairs were drawn from the library and dining-room and from above-stairs, and frantically dusted with Nichola's apron. The lilies were turned from the windows to look inward on the room and a little table for the Bible was laid with a white cloth and set with a vase of lilies. And in spite of Nichola, who every moment scolded and prophesied and nodded her head in the certainty that all the thunders of the church would descend upon us, we were ready when the door-bell rang. I peeped from the drawing-room window and saw that our steps were filled!

"Nichola," said I, trembling, "you will come up to the service, will you not?"

Nichola shook her old gray head.

"It's a nonsense," she shrilly proclaimed. "It will not be civilized. It will not be religious. I'll open the door on 'em, but I won't do nothink elst, mem."

When we heard their garments in the hall and the voice of Little Friend, Pelleas pushed back the curtains and there was our Easter, come to us upon the threshold.

I shall not soon forget the fragile, gentle figure who led them. The Reverend Stephen Lovelow came in with outstretched hand, and I have forgotten what he said or indeed whether he spoke at all. But he took our hands and greeted us as the disciple must have greeted the host of that House of the Upper Room. We led the way to the table where he laid his worn Bible and he stood in silence while the others found their places, marshaled briskly by Little Friend who as captain was no less efficient than as deliverer. There were chairs to spare, and when every one was seated, in perfect quiet, the young clergyman bowed his head: —

"Lord, thou hast made thy face to shine upon us —" he prayed, and it seemed to me that our shabby drawing-room was suddenly quick with a presence more intimate than that of the lilies.

When the hymn was given out and there was a fluttering of leaves of the hymn-books they had

brought, five of our guests at a nod from Mr. Lovelow made their way forward. One was a young woman with a ruddy face, but ruddy with that strange, wrinkled ruddiness of age rather than youth, who wore a huge felt hat laden with flaming roses evidently added expressly for Easter day. She had on a thin waist of flimsy pink with a collar of beads and silver braid, and there were stones of all colours in a half-dozen rings on her hands. She took her place at the piano with an ease almost defiant and she played the hymn not badly, I must admit, and sang in a full riotous soprano. Meanwhile, at her side was ranged the choir. There were four — a great watch-dog of a bass with swelling veins upon his forehead and erect reddish hair; a little round contralto in a plush cap and a dress trimmed with the appliquéd flowers cut from a lace curtain; a tall, shy soprano who looked from one to another through the hymn as if she were in personal exhortation; and a pleasant-faced tenor who sang with a will that was good to hear and was evidently the choir leader, for he beat time with a stumpy, cracked hand set with a huge black ring on its middle finger. The little woman next me offered her book and I had a glimpse of a pinched side-face, with a displaced strand of gray hair and a loose linen collar with no cravat, but I have seldom heard a sweeter voice than that which up-trembled beside me — although, poor

little woman! she was sadly ill at ease because the thumb which rested on the book next me was thrust in a glove fully an inch too long. As for Pelleas, he was sharing a book with a youngish man, stooped, long-armed, with a mane of black hair, whom Mr. Lovelow afterward told me had lost his position in a sweat-shop through drawing some excellent cartoons on the box of his machine. Mr. Lovelow himself was "looking over" with a mother and daughter who were later presented to us, and who embarrassed any listener by persistently talking in concert, each repeating a few words of what the other had just said, quite in the fashion of the most gently bred talkers bent upon assuring each other of their spontaneous sympathy and response.

And what a hymn it was! After the first stanza they gained in confidence, and a volume of sound filled the low room — ay, and a world of spirit, too. "Christ the Lord is risen to-day, Hallelu—jah! . . ." they caroled, and Pelleas, who never can sing a tune aloud although he declares indignantly that in his head he keeps it perfectly, and I, who do not sing at all, both joined perforce in the triumphant chorus. Ah, I dare say that farther down the avenue were sweet-voiced choirs that sang music long rehearsed, golden, flowing, and yet I think there was no more fervent Easter music than that in which we joined. It was as if the other music were the censer-smoke,

and we were its shadow on the ground, but a proof of the sun for all that.

I cannot now remember all that simple service, perhaps because I so well remember the glory of the hour. I sat where I could see the park stretching away, black upon silver and silver upon black, over the Ascension lilies. The face of the young minister was illumined as he read and talked to his people. I think that I have never known such gentleness, never such yearning and tenderness as were his with that handful of crude and careless and devout. And though he spoke passionately and convincingly I could not but think that he was like some dumb thing striving for the utterance of the secret fire within — striving to "burn aloud," as a violin beseeches understanding. Perhaps there is no other way to tell the story of that first day of the week — "early, when it was yet dark."

"They had brought sweet spices," he said, "with which to anoint Him. Where are the spices that we have brought to-day? Have we aught of sacrifice, of charity, of zeal, of adoration — let us lay them at His feet, an offering acceptable unto the Lord, a token of our presence at the door of the sepulcher from which the stone was rolled away. Where are the sweet spices of our hands, where the pound of ointment of spikenard wherewith we shall anoint the feet of our living Lord? For if we bring of our

spiritual possession, the Christ will suffer us, even as He suffered Mary; and the house shall be filled with the odour of the ointment."

"And the house shall be filled with the odour of the ointment," I said over to myself. Is it not strange how a phrase, a vista, a bar of song, a thought beneath the open stars, will almost pierce the veil?

"And the house shall be filled with the odour of the ointment," I said silently all through the last prayer and the last hymn and the benediction of "The Lord make his face to shine upon you, the Lord give you peace." And some way, with our rising, the abashment which is an integral part of all such gatherings as we had convoked was not to be reckoned with, and straightway the presentations and the words of gratitude and even the pretty anxiety of Little Friend fluttering among us were spontaneous and unconstrained. It was quite as if, Pelleas said afterward, we had been reduced to a common denominator. Indeed, it seems to me in remembering the day as if half the principles of Christian sociology were illustrated there in our shabby drawing-room; but for that matter I would like to ask what complexities of political science, what profound bases of *solidarité*, are not on the way to be solved in the presence of Easter lilies? I am in all these matters most stupid and simple, but at all events I am not blameful

enough to believe that they are exhausted by the theories.

Every one lingered for a little, in proof of the success of our venture. Pelleas and I talked with the choir and with the pianiste, and this lady informed us that our old rosewood piano, which we apologetically explained to have been ours for fifty years, was every bit as good and every bit as loud as a new golden-oak "instrument" belonging to her sister. The tall, shy soprano told us haltingly how much she had enjoyed the hour and her words conveyed sincerity in spite of her strange system of overemphasis of everything she said, and of carrying down the corners of her mouth as if in deprecation. The plump little contralto thanked us, too, with a most winning smile — such round open eyes she had, immovably fixed on the object of her attention, and as Pelleas said such *evident* eyes.

"Her eyes looked so amazingly like eyes," he afterward commented whimsically.

We talked too with the little woman of the long-thumbed gloves who had the extraordinary habit of smiling faintly and turning away her head whenever she detected any one looking at her. And the sweat-shop cartoonist proved to be an engaging young giant with the figure of a Greek god, classic features, a manner of gravity amounting almost to hauteur, and as pronounced an East Side dialect as I have ever heard.

"Will you not let us," I said to him, after Mr. Lovelow's word about his talent, "see your drawings sometime? It would give us great pleasure."

Whereupon, "Sure. Me, I'll toin de whol' of 'em over to youse," said the Greek god, thumbs out and shoulders flickering.

But back of these glimpses of reality among them there was something still more real; and though I dare say there will be some who will smile at the affair and call that interest curiosity and those awkward thanks mere aping of convention, yet Pelleas and I who have a modest degree of intelligence and who had the advantage of being present do affirm that on that Easter morning countless little doors were opened in the air to admit a throng of presences. We cannot tell how it may have been, and we are helpless before all argument and incredulity, but we know that a certain stone was rolled away from the door of the hearts of us all, and there were with us those in shining garments.

In the midst of all I turned to ask our Little Friend some trivial thing and I saw that which made my old heart leap. Little Friend stood before a table of the lilies and with her was young Mr. Lovelow. And something — I cannot tell what it may have been, but in these matters I am rarely mistaken; and something — as she looked up and he looked down — made me know past all doubting how

it was with them. And this open secret of their love was akin to the mysteries of the day itself. The gentle, sad young clergyman and our Little Friend of the crimson muffler had suddenly opened to us another door and admitted another joyous presence. I cannot tell how it may be with every one else but for Pelleas and me one such glimpse — a glimpse of two faces alight with happiness on the street, in a car, or wherever they may be — is enough to make glad a whole gray week. Though to be sure no week is ever wholly gray.

I was still busy with the sweet surprise of this and longing for opportunity to tell Pelleas, when they all moved toward the door and with good-byes filed into the hall. And there in the anteroom stood Nichola, our old servant, who brushed my elbow and said in my ear: —

"Mem, every one of 'em looks starvin'. I've a kettle of hot coffee on the back of the range an' there's fresh sponge-cake in plenty. I've put cups on the dinin'-room table, an' I thought —"

"Nichola!" said I, in a low and I must believe ecstatic tone.

"An' no end o' work it's made me, too," added our old servant sourly, and not to be thought in the least gracious.

It was a very practical ending to that radiant Easter morning but I dare say we could have devised

none better. Moreover Nichola had ready sandwiches and a fresh cheese of her own making, and a great bowl of some simple salad dressed as only her Italian hands can dress it. I wondered as I sat in the circle of our guests, a vase of Easter lilies on the table, whether Nichola, that grim old woman who scorned to come to our service, had yet not brought her pound of ointment of spikenard, very precious.

"You and Mr. Lovelow are to spend the afternoon and have tea with us," I whispered Little Friend, and had the joy of seeing the tell-tale colour leap gloriously to her cheek and a tell-tale happiness kindle in his eyes. I am never free from amazement that a mere word or so humble a plan for another's pleasure can give such joy. Verily, one would suppose that we would all be so busy at this pastime that we would almost neglect our duties.

So when the others were gone these two lingered. All through the long Spring afternoon they sat with us beside our crackling fire of bavin-sticks, telling us of this and that homely interest, of some one's timid hope and another's sacrifice, in the life of the little mission. Ah, I dare say that Carlyle and Hugo have the master's hand for touching open a casement here and there and letting one look in upon an isolated life, and sympathizing for one passionate moment turn away before the space is closed again

with darkness; but these two were destined that day to give us glimpses not less poignant, to open to us so many unknown hearts that we would be justified in never again being occupied with our own concerns. And when after tea they stood in the dusk of the hallway trying to say good-bye, I think that their secret must have shone in our faces too; and, as the children say, "we all knew that we all knew," and life was a thing of heavenly blessedness.

Young Mr. Lovelow took the hand of Pelleas, and mine he kissed.

"The Lord bless you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you, the Lord give you peace," was in his eyes as he went away.

"And, O, sir," Little Friend said shyly to Pelleas as she stood at the top of the steps, knotting her crimson muffler, "ain't it good, after all, that Easter was all over ice?"

That night Pelleas carried upstairs a great armful of the Ascension lilies to stand in the moonlight of our window. We took lilies to the mantel, and set stalks of bloom on the table, with their trumpets turned within upon the room. And when the lower lights had been extinguished and Nichola had bidden us her grumbling good-night, we opened the door of that upper room where the moon was silvering the lilies; and we stood still, smitten with a common surprise.

"Pelleas," I said, uncertainly, "O, Pelleas. I thought —"

"So did I," said Pelleas, with a deep breath.

We bent above the lilies that looked so sweet-scented and yet had been barren of fragrance because, we had told ourselves, they seemed flowers of symbol without mission or message beyond the symbol, without hue or passion, or, so to say, experience. ("Perhaps if one were to make some one happy with them or to put them in a bride's bouquet they would no longer be scentless," Pelleas had quaintly said.) And now we were certain, as we stood hushed beside them, that our Easter lilies were giving out a faint, delicious fragrance.

I looked up at Pelleas almost fearfully in the flood of Spring moonlight. The radiance was full on his white hair and tranquil face, and he met my eyes with the knowledge that we were suddenly become the custodians of an exquisite secret. The words of the young servant of God came to me understandingly.

"'And the house shall be filled with the odour of the ointment,'" I said over. "O, Pelleas," I added, tremulously, "do you think . . ."

Pelleas lifted his face and I thought that it shone in the dimness.

"Ah, well," he answered, "we must believe all the beautiful things we can."

II

THE MATINÉE

SOMEWHAT later in the Spring Pelleas was obliged to spend one whole day out of town. He was vastly important over the circumstance and packed his bag two days before, which alone proves his advancing years. For formerly his way had been to complete his packing in the cab on his way to the train at that moment pulling from the station. Now he gave himself an hour to reach the ferry to allow for being blocked.

"Yes, that alone would prove that we are seventy," I said sadly as I stood at the window watching him drive away.

Yet if ever a good fairy grants you one wish I advise your wishing that when you are seventy your heart and some one else's heart will be as heavy at a separation as are ours.

"Pelleas," I had said to him that morning, "I wish that every one in the world could love some one as much as I love you."

And Pelleas had answered seriously: —

"Remember, Etarre, that every one in the world

who is worth anything either loves as we do or expects to do so, or else is unhappy because he doesn't."

"Not every one?" I remonstrated.

"Every one," Pelleas repeated firmly.

I wondered about that after he went away. Not every one, surely. There was, for exception, dear Hobart Eddy who walked the world alone, loving every one exactly alike; and there was, for the other extreme, Nichola, our old servant. She was worth a very great deal but she loved nobody, not even us; and I was sure that she prided herself on it. I could not argue with Pelleas on the eve of a journey but I harboured the matter against his return.

I was lonely when Pelleas was gone. I was sitting by the fire with Semiramis on my knee — an Angora cannot wholly sympathize with you but her aloofness can persuade you into peace of mind — when the telephone bell rang. We are so seldom wanted that the mere ringing of the bell is an event even, as usually happens, if we are called in mistake. This time, however, old Nichola, whose tone over the telephone is like that of all three voices of Cerberus saying "No admission," came in to announce that I was wanted by Miss Wilhelmina Lillieblade. I hurried excitedly out, for when Miss "Willie" Lillieblade telephones she has usually either heard some interesting news or longs to invent some. She is almost seventy as

well as I. As a girl she was not very interesting, but I sometimes think that like many other inanimate objects she has improved with age until now she is delightful and reminds me of spiced cordials. I never see a stupid young person without applying the inanimate object rule and longing to comfort him with it.

"Etarre," Miss Willie said, "you and Pelleas come over for tea this afternoon. I am alone and I have a lame shoulder."

"I'll come with pleasure," said I readily, "but Pelleas is away."

"O," Miss Willie said without proper regret, "Pelleas is away."

For a moment she thought.

"Etarre," she said, "let's lunch downtown together and go to a matinée."

I could hardly believe my old ears.

"W — we two?" I quavered.

"Certainly!" she confirmed it, "I'll come in the coupé at noon."

I made a faint show of resistance. "What about your lame shoulder?" I wanted to know.

"Pooh!" said Miss Willie, "that will be dead in a minute and then I won't know whether it's lame or not."

The next moment she had left the telephone and I had promised!

I went upstairs in a delicious flutter of excitement. When our niece Lisa is with us I watch her go breezily off to matinées with her young friends, but "matinée" is to me one of the words that one says often though they mean very little to one, like "ant-arctic." I protest that I felt myself to be as intimate with the appearance of the New Hebrides as with the ways of a matinée. I fancy that it was twenty years since I had seen one. Say what you will, evening theater-going is far more commonplace; for in the evening one is frivolous by profession but afternoon frivolity is stolen fruit. And being a very frivolous old woman I find that a nibble or so of stolen fruit leavens the toast and tea. Innocent stolen fruit, mind you, for heaven forbid that I should prescribe a diet of dust and ashes.

I had taken from its tissues my lace waist and was making it splendid with a scrap of lavender velvet when our old servant brought in fresh candles. She looked with suspicion on the garment.

"Nichola," I said guiltily, "I'm going to a matinée. And you'll need get no luncheon," I hastened to add, "because I'm lunching with Miss Lillieblade."

"Yah!" said Nichola, "going to a matinée?"

Nichola says "matiknee," and she regards a theater box as among all self-indulgences the unpardonable sin.

"You'll have no luncheon to get, Nichola," I persuasively reminded her.

Old Nichola clicked the wax candles.

"Me, I'd rather get up lunch for a fambly o' shepherds," she grimly assured me, "than to hev you lose your immortal soul at this late day."

She went back to the kitchen and I was minded to take off the lavender velvet; but I did not do so, my religion being independent of the spectrum.

At noon Nichola was in the drawing-room fastening my gaiters when Miss Lillieblade came in, erect as a little brown and white toy with a chocolate cloak and a frosting hood.

"We are going to see 'The End of the World,'" said Miss Willie blithely,—"I knew you haven't seen it, Etarre."

Old Nichola, who is so privileged that she will expect polite attention even on her death-bed, listened eagerly.

"Is it somethin' of a religious play, mem?" she hopefully inquired.

"I dare say, Nichola," replied Miss Willie kindly; and afterward, to me: "But I hope not. Religious plays are so ungodly."

Her footman helped us down the steps, not by any means that we required it but for what does one pay a footman I would like to ask? And we drove away to a little place which I cannot call a café. I would

as readily lunch at a ribbon-counter as in a café. But this was a little place where Pelleas and I often had our tea, a place that was all of old rugs and old brasses in front, and in secret was set with tête-à-tête tables having each one rose and one shaded candle. The linen was what a café would call lace and the china may have been china or it may have been garlands and love-knots. From where I sat I could see shelves filled with home-made jam, labeled, like library-books, and looking far more attractive than some peoples' libraries. We ordered tea and chicken-broth and toast and a salad and, because we had both been forbidden, a sweet. I am bound to say that neither of us ate the sweet but we pretended not to notice.

We talked about the old days — this is no sign of old age but rather of a good memory; and presently I was reminded of what Pelleas had assured me that morning about love.

"Where did you go to school?" Miss Willie had been asking me.

"At Miss Mink's and Miss Burdick's," I answered, "and I was counting up the other day that if either of them is alive now she is about one hundred and five years old and in the newspapers on her birthday."

"Miss Mink and Miss Burdick alive now," Miss Willie repeated. "No, indeed. They would rather die than be alive now. They would call it proof of

ill-breeding not to die at threescore and ten each according to rule. I went to Miss Trelawney's. I had an old aunt who had brought me up to say 'Ma'am?' when I failed to understand; but if I said 'Ma'am?' in school, Miss Trelawney made me learn twenty lines of Dante; and if I *didn't* say it at home I was not allowed to have dessert. Between the two I loved poetry and had a good digestion and my education extended no farther."

"That is quite far enough," I said. "I don't know a better preparation for life than love of poetry and a good digestion."

If I could have but one — and yet why should I take sides and prejudice anybody? Still, Pelleas had a frightful dyspepsia one winter and it would have taken forty poets armed to the teeth — but I really refuse to prejudice anybody.

Then I told Miss Willie how at Miss Mink's and Miss Burdick's I had had my first note from a *boy;* I slept with it under my pillow and I forgot it and the maid carried it to Miss Mink, and I blush to recall that I appeared before that lady with the defense that according to poetry my note was worth more than her entire curriculum, and triumphantly referred her to "Summum Bonum." She sent me home, I recall. And then Miss Willie told how having successfully evaded chapel one winter evening at Miss Trelawney's she had waked in the night with the certainty

that she had lost her soul in consequence and, unable to rid herself of the conviction, she had risen and gone barefoot through the icy halls to the chapel and there had been horrified to find old Miss Trelawney kneeling with a man's photograph in her hands.

"Isn't it strange, Etarre," said Miss Willie, "how the little mysteries and surprises of loving some one are everywhere, from one's first note from a *boy* to the Miss Trelawneys whom every one knows?"

Sometimes I think that it is almost impudent to wonder about one's friends when one is certain beyond wondering that they all have secret places in their hearts filled with delight and tears. But remembering what Pelleas had said that morning I did wonder about Miss Willie, since I knew that for all her air of spiced cordial she was lonely; and yet mentally I placed Miss Willie beside old Nichola and Hobart Eddy, intending to use all three as instances to crush the argument of Pelleas. Surely of all the world, I decided, those three loved nobody.

At last we left the pleasant table, nodding good-afternoon to the Cap and Ribbons who had been cut from a coloured print to serve us. We lingered among the brasses and the casts, feeling very humble before the proprietor who looked like a duchess cut from another coloured print. I envied her that library of jelly.

On the street Miss Willie bought us each a rose for company and then bade the coachman drive slowly so that we entered the theater with the orchestra, which is the only proper moment. If one is earlier one feels as if one looked ridiculously expectant; if one is later one misses the pleasure of being expectant at all. We were in a lower stage box and all the other boxes were filled with bouquets of young people, with a dry stalk or two magnificently bonneted set stiffly among them. I hope that we did not seem too absurd, Miss Willie and I with our bobbing white curls all alone in that plump crimson box.

"The End of the World" proved to be a fresh, happy play, fragrant of lavender and sweet air. The play was about a man and a woman who loved each other very much with no analyses or confessions to disturb any one. The blinds were open and the sun streamed in through four acts of pleasant humour and quick action among well-bred people who manifestly had been brought up to marry and give in marriage without trying to compete with a state where neither is done. In the fourth act the moon shone on a little châlet in the leaves and one saw that there are love and sacrifice and good will enough to carry on the world in spite of its other connections. It was a play which made me thankful that Pelleas and I have clung to each other through society and poverty

and dyspepsia and never have allied ourselves with the other side. And if any one thinks that there is a middle ground I, who am seventy, know far better.

Now in the third act it chanced that the mother of the play, so to speak, at the height of her ambition that her daughter marry a fortune as she herself had done, opened an old desk and came upon a photograph of the love of her own youth, whom she had not married. That was a sufficiently hackneyed situation, and the question that smote the mother must be one that is beating in very many hearts that give no sign; for she had truly loved this boy and he had died constant to her. And the woman prayed that when she died she might "go back and be with him." Personally, being a very hard and unforgiving old woman, I had little patience with her; and besides I think better of heaven than to believe in any such necessity. Still this may be because Pelleas and I are certain that we will belong to each other when we die. Perhaps if I had not married him — but then I did.

Hardly had the curtain fallen when to my amazement Miss Willie Lillieblade leaned forward with this: —

"Etarre, do you believe that those who truly love each other here are going to know each other when they die?"

"Certainly!" I cried, fearing the very box would crumble at the heresy of that doubt.

"No matter how long after . . ." she said wistfully.

"Not a bit of difference," I returned positively.

"You and Pelleas can be surer than most," Miss Willie said reflectively, "but suppose one of you had died fifty years ago. Would you be so sure?"

"Why, of course," I replied, "Pelleas was always Pelleas."

"So he was," Miss Willie assented and was silent for a little; and then, without warning: —

"Etarre, I mean this," she said, speaking rapidly and not meeting my eyes. "When I was twenty I met a boy a little older than I, and I had known him only a few months when he went abroad to join his father. Before he went — he told me that he loved me —" it was like seeing jonquils bloom in snow to hear Miss Willie say this — "and I know that I loved him. But I did not go with him — he wanted me to go and I did not go with him — for stupid reasons. He was killed on a mountain in Switzerland. And I wonder and wonder — you see that was fifty years ago," said Miss Willie, "but I wonder . . ."

I sat up very straight, hardly daring to look at her. All you young people who talk with such pretty concern of love, do you know what it will be when

you are seventy to come suddenly on one of these flowers, still fresh, which you toss about you now?

"Since he died loving you and you have loved him all these years," I said, trying to keep my voice steady, "never tell me that you will not be each other's — afterward."

And at least no one need gainsay this who is not prepared to prove the contrary.

"But where — where?" cried Miss Willie, poor little Miss Willie, echoing the cry of every one in the world. It was very strange to see this little vial of spiced cordial wondering about the immortality of love.

"I don't know where or how," I said, "but believe it and you'll see."

Ah, how I reproached myself later to think that I could have said no more than that. Many a fine response that I might have made I compounded afterward, all about love that is infinite and eternal so that it fills the universe and one cannot get beyond it, and so on, in long phrases; but there in that box not one other word could I say. And yet when one thinks of it what is there to say when one is asked about this save simply: "I don't know how or where, but believe it and you'll see."

We said little else, and I sat there with all that company of blue and pink waists dancing about me through a mist in a fashion that would have as-

tonished them. So much for Miss Willie as an instance in my forthcoming argument with Pelleas about every one in the world loving some one. Miss Willie had gone over to his side of the case outright. I began to doubt that there would be an argument. Still, there would always be Hobart Eddy, inalienably on my side and serenely loving every one alike. And there would always be Nichola, loving nobody. If all the world fell in love and went quite mad, there would yet be Nichola fluting her "Yah!" to any such fancy.

I dare say that neither Miss Willie nor I heard very much of that last act in spite of its moonlit châlet among the leaves. But one picture I carried away with me and the sound of one voice. They were those of a girl, a very happy girl, waiting at the door of the châlet.

"Dear," she said to her sweetheart, "if we had never met, if we had never seen each other, it seems as if my love for you would have followed you without my knowing. Maybe some day you would have heard it knocking at your heart, and you would have called it a wish or a dream."

Afterward I recalled that I was saying over those words as we made our way up the aisle.

We were almost the last to leave the theater. I like that final glimpse of a place where happy people have just been. We found the coupé and a frantic

carriageman put us in, very gently, though he banged the door in that fashion which seems to be the only outlet to a carriageman's emotions.

"Good-night," said Miss Willie Lillieblade at my door, and gave my hand an unwonted lingering touch. I knew why. Dear, starved heart, she must have longed for years to talk about that boy. I watched her coupé roll toward the great lonely house. Never tell me that the boy who died in Switzerland was not beside her hearth waiting her coming.

Our drawing-room was dimly lighted. I took off my bonnet there and found myself longing for my tea. I am wont to ring for Nichola only upon stately occasions and certainly not at times when in her eyes I tremble on the brink of "losing my immortal soul at this late day." Accordingly I went down to the kitchen.

I cautiously pushed open the door, for I am frankly afraid of Nichola who is in everything a frightful non-conformist. There was no fire on the hearth, but the bracket lamp was lighted and on a chair lay Nichola's best shawl. Nichola, in her best black frock and wearing her best bonnet, was just arranging the tea-things on a tray.

"I'm glad that you've been out, Nichola," said I gently — as gently as a truant child, I fancy! — "It is such a beautiful day."

"Who," Nichola said grimly without looking at me, "said I'd been out?"

"Why, I saw you —" I began.

"Where was I?" Nichola demanded shrilly, whirling about.

"I saw you with your bonnet on," said I, and added with dignity, "You may bring the tea up at once, and mind that there is plenty of hot water."

Then I scurried upstairs, my heart beating at my daring. I had actually ordered Nichola about. I half expected that in consequence she would bring me cold water, but she came up quietly enough with some delicious tea and sandwiches. At the door, with unwonted meekness, she asked me if everything was right; and I, not abating one jot of my majesty, told her that there might be a bit more cream. She even brought that and left me marveling. I could as easily imagine the kitchen range with an emotion as Nichola with a guilty conscience, and yet sometimes I have a guilty conscience myself and I always act first very self-sufficient and then very humble, just like Nichola.

When she was handing the dessert that night at my solitary dinner, she spoke; and if the kitchen range had kissed a hand at me I should not have been more amazed.

"Every one took their parts very well this afternoon, I thought," she stiffly volunteered.

I looked at her blankly. Then slowly it dawned for me: The best shawl, the guilty conscience — Nichola had been to the matinée!

"Nichola!" I said unguardedly. "Were you —"

"Certain," she said curtly, "I ain't no call to be no more careful o' my soul than what you are."

I, the keeper of Nichola, who has bullied Pelleas and me about for years!

"Did — did you like it, Nichola?" I asked doubtfully, a little unaware how to treat a discussion of original sin like this.

"Yes, I did," she replied unexpectedly. "But — do you believe all of it?"

"Believe that it really happened?" I asked in bewilderment.

"No," said Nichola, catching up a corner of the table-cloth in her brown fingers; "believe what she said — in the door there?"

It came to me then dimly, but before I could tell or remember . . .

"That about 'If we hadn't never met,'" Nichola quoted; "'it sorter seems as though my love would 'a' followed you up even if I didn't know about it an' mebbe you'd 'a' heard it somewheres an' 'a' thought you was a-wishin' or a-dreamin' —' that part," said Nichola.

And then I understood — I understood.

"Nichola," I said, "yes. I believe it with all my heart. I know it is so!"

Nichola looked at me wistfully.

"But wishin' may be just wishin'," she said, "an' dreamin' nights may be just dreamin' nights —"

"Never," I cried positively. "Most of the time these are voices of the people who would have loved us if we had ever met."

Old Nichola's face, with its little unremembering eyes beneath her gray moss hair, seldom changes expression save to look angry. I think that Nichola, like the carriageman slamming the doors, relieves all emotion by anger. When I die I expect that in proof of her grief she will drive every one out of the house with the broom. Therefore I was not surprised to see her look at me now with a sudden frown and flush that should have terrorized me.

"Heaven over us!" she said, turning abruptly. "The silly folks that dream. I never dreamed a thing in my life. Do you want more pudding-sauce?"

"No," I said gently, "no, Nichola."

I was not deceived. Nichola knew it, and went in the pantry, muttering. But I was not deceived. I knew what she had meant. Nichola, that old woman whose life had some way been cast up on this barren coast near the citadel of the love of Pelleas and me; Nichola, who had lived lonely in the

grim company of the duties of a household not her own; Nichola, at more than sixty, was welcoming the belief that the love which she never had inspired was some way about her all the time.

Where was my side of the argument to be held with Pelleas? Where, indeed? But I was glad to see it go. And I serenely put away until another time the case of Hobart Eddy.

All the evening I sat quietly before the hearth. There was no need for books. The drawing-room was warm and bright; supper for Pelleas was drawn to the open fire and my rose was on the tray. When I heard him close the front door it seemed to me that I must welcome him for us three, for Miss Willie and Nichola and me.

III

THE PATH OF IN-THE-SPRING

THE case of Hobart Eddy had always interested us,—dear Hobart Eddy with whom matters stood like this: Heaven had manifestly intended him to be a Young Husband, and yet he was thirty-five and walked the world alone.

Pelleas and I were wont to talk of him before our drawing-room fire. Hobart Eddy, we were agreed, was one of the men who look like a young husband. By that I cannot in the least explain what I mean, but he was wont to bend above a book or lean toward a picture exactly as another man would say: "And how are you to-day, dear?" If he were to have entered a coach in which I was traveling I think that I should involuntarily have looked about for some girlish face to be lighting at his coming. Therefore we two had been wont to amuse ourselves by picturing, but without much hope, his possible wife; she must be so many things to him that we found it difficult to select any one in whom to rest our expectation, faint yet persistent. Though I knew no one save Pelleas himself who would have been as a lover

so adorable, as a husband so tender, the problem was not quite so simple; for Hobart Eddy was a king of the social hour and a ruler of many.

"The allegro, quite the allegro of my dinner symphony," Miss Willie Lillieblade had once thankfully flattered him. "Ah, you were more. You were the absolute conductor. You were the salvation of our tempo during the entrée. The dear Bishop, who thought he was the religious theme for the trombones, how you quieted his ecclesiastical chantings. How you modulated the sputterings of that French horn of a count. And ah, my dear Hobart, how you obeyed my anxious *sforzando* over my mute little guest of honour. I've no *beaux yeux* to look you thanks, but I appreciated every breath of your baton."

Thus, with his own charm, Hobart Eddy was one whom it was a simple thing to adore; and as Pelleas said with twinkling cruelty débutantes are dear, simple things. But among them all season after season Hobart moved, boyishly interested, urbanely ready as we thought to do the homage of the devotee and, one might have said, urbanely unable. And season after season we had failed to plan for him a concrete romance. For we thought that his wife should be no less than he a social ruler of many, yet she must have his own detached heart of youth. Moreover, we wished her to be clever, but

not to every one; and wise, though with a pretty unreason; and girlishly unconscious, or if she was conscious then just conscious enough; and very willing to be ordered about a bit, though losing none of her pretty imperiousness — ah well, no wonder the case of Hobart Eddy baffled us. No wonder that I believed him hopeless as I had believed Nichola, who loves no one. We should long ago have laid the matter by if only there had not persisted about him that Devoted Young Husband look.

It was in the week made memorable both by our Easter day experience and by the moral of my matinée that our thought momentarily took up the case of Hobart Eddy in earnest. Indeed, our Easter day and my matinée did much to shape our Summer. For on a sudden it seemed so easy to make happiness in the world as well as to look close and read the fine print of romance that we found ourselves with almost no leisure. And in that very week Viola unexpectedly came home from school.

Viola is a niece of my dear Madame Sally Chartres and the previous Spring she had nominally spent a week with Pelleas and me. I say nominally because in reality she had spent it before the telephone on our landing.

"Viola, who," Pelleas had been wont to say, "sounds like a Greek maiden captive in an Illyrian

household and beloved of a Greek youth, *Telephone*, in four syllables."

He was a young bank clerk in Broad street and he seemed to have a theory that whenever any one else had used the telephone Viola was no longer at the other end, and he was obliged to make sure. "Miss Viola, the telephone wants to talk to you," Nichola had announced all day long. And though Pelleas and I are the first to love a lover, some way the case failed to impress us to partisanship — just as we lose sympathy with the influenza of a man who is perpetually shutting the car door.

"If I were a telephone," Pelleas would say, "intended by Science for uses of medicine, bonds and the like I should get out of order if they tried to make me a courtier."

"Pelleas," I had justly protested, "you would be the first to be delighted."

"Ah, yes," he admitted, "I dare say I should, but then you see I know so little about science."

When that Summer it was decided that Viola should complete her school in Switzerland, Pelleas and I understood that the Chartres family sympathized with our own impression about our telephone. But before the end of the year Viola unexpectedly returned from Lausanne. And the April day on which we learned of this from Hobart Eddy was further memorable to us: For it was on that very

morning that the first rose-breasted grosbeaks appeared in the park.

West of the walk leading from the south to the Reservoir Castle in the park there is a little brick path, steep and uneven and running crookedly downward like a mere mood of the sober walk itself. The path is railed in from the crowding green things on either side, but the rail hardly thwarts a magnificent Forsythia which tosses its sprays to curve high over the way like the curve of wings in flight. It was a habit of ours to seek out this path once or twice every Spring and to stand beneath these branches. Some way when we did that we were *sure* that it was Spring, for we seemed to catch its high moment; as for another a bell might strike somewhere with "One, two, three: Now it is the crest of May. Four, five, six: Now this apple-tree is at the very height of its bloom. This is *the moment* of this rose." We called this path the path of In-the-Spring. We always went there in the mornings, for in Spring we think that it seems to be *more* Spring in the morning than in the afternoon. And it was here of an April Nine-o'clock that we saw our first pair of grosbeaks of the year.

They alighted quite close to us as if for them we were not there. They were on some pleasant business of testing the flavour of buds and the proud, rose-throated male, vibrating his wings the while,

gave us his note as if he were the key to the whole matter. And I think that he was .. .—.....⌒⌒ .—.—? he imparted, and it was like revelation and prophecy and belief; so that for a moment we were near knowing what he meant and what he is and what we and the Forsythia are. But the information escaped us and the grosbeaks flew away. However, they left us their blessing. For there was a little glow in our hearts at having been so near.

"Now," Pelleas said as we mounted the steep path back to the real walk (so innocently absorbed the real walk looked and as if it knew nothing at all about its gay little aberration of a path!). "Now, that must mean something."

"Of course it must," said I contentedly. "What must, Pelleas?"

He answered solemnly: That when a bird or a child or a wood-creature shows you confidence it always indicates that something pleasant is about to happen. I detected his mood of improvisation; but who am I to dissent from an improvisation so satisfying?

We sat on the first bench and Pelleas drew out our March-April record. In a little town of the West which we know and love there is kept each Spring on the bulletin board of the public library a list of dates of the return of the migratory birds with the names of those who first saw and reported them;

and there is the pleasantest rivalry among the citizens to determine who shall announce the earliest appearances. From time to time through the Spring this list is printed in the daily newspaper. Since we knew of this beautiful custom Pelleas and I have always made a list, for Spring. That day our record read: —

March 9th . . Robin, Pelleas.
March 10th . . Bluebird, Etarre.
March 12th . . Phœbe, Etarre.

NOTE. — Earliest we have seen in five years.

March 16th . . Geese (flying), Pelleas.
March 21st . . Song Sparrow, Pelleas.
March 21st . . Meadow Lark, Pelleas.

NOTE. — Not perfectly certain. Nearly so.

April 5th . . House Wren, Etarre.

NOTE. — Did not see it. Heard it.

April 12th . . High Holder, Etarre.
April 14th . . Sparrow Hawk, Pelleas.

NOTE. — May have been a pigeon hawk.

April 29th . . Rose-breasted grosbeaks (pair), Etarre and Pelleas.

"It sounds like a programme of music," I said.

"All lists are wonderful things," said Pelleas, folding ours away in his portmonnaie; "one ought to 'keep' a great many."

I did not at once agree. To be sure I believe passionately in lists of birds; but in the main I profess for lists a profound indifference. As for "keeping

a diary" I would as soon describe a walk in the woods by telling the number of steps I had taken.

"One cannot make a list of the glory of a thing," I ventured at last.

"Well, no," Pelleas admitted. "If only one could what a talisman it would be to take out and read, on one's worst days."

It would indeed. But I suppose that one's list of Spring birds would help one on such a day if one would, so to speak, read deep down into the page.

"We might make a 'Bird List: Part Two,'" Pelleas suggested, "for that kind of thing."

"But how could one?" I objected; "for example: '*April 29th — Rose-breasted grosbeak day. A momentary knowledge that there is more about a bird and about what he is and about what we are than one commonly supposes.*' You see, Pelleas, how absurd that would be."

"Ah, well," he protested stoutly, "one needn't try to write it out in words. One could merely indicate it. Just that would help one to keep alive the thrill of a thing. Such a device would be very dear to every one."

That is true. To keep alive the thrill of a thing, of revelation, of prophecy, of belief — we all go asking how to do that.

"I dare say though," Pelleas said, "that one could keep it alive by merely passing it on. The point is

to keep such moments *alive*. Not necessarily to keep them for one's own."

To keep alive the thrill of that moment when we had seen the grosbeaks, the high moment of a Spring morning; not to know these little ecstasies briefly, but to abide in their essential peace; is this not as if one were arbiter of certain modes of immortality?

"Surely that would make one a 'restorer of paths to dwell in,'" he added.

"A restorer of the path of In-the-Spring," I said.

Pelleas turned the glasses on the magnolias. "On my soul," he exclaimed, "I thought I saw a tanager!" And when we had stood for a moment to watch hopefully and had been disappointed ("Why shouldn't an early tanager come, to help us to believe?" he wondered), he gave a vital spark to what I had said about the path: —

"I suppose that that little path really has no ending," he said; "you cannot end direction. Yes, the path of In-the-Spring must run right away to the end of the world."

We walked on happily, counting the robins, listening to a near phœbe call to a far phœbe, watching two wrens pull slivers from a post for a nest they knew. Across the green, but too far away for certainty, we thought we saw a cherry bough in flower. .. .— ..... .⌒⌒ .—? we heard the gros-

beak once again from somewhere invisible. The mornings on which we walk in the park seem to us almost like youth.

The augury that something pleasant was about to happen was further fulfilled when we came in sight of our house and saw Hobart Eddy's great appalling French touring car like an elephant kneeling at our curb. Hobart was waiting for us in the drawing-room and he stood before us looking down from his splendid height and getting his own way from the first.

"Come, Aunt Etarre," he said, "there is no car like her. I want you both to run over to Inglese to see Viola. You knew that she has come home?"

"Viola — has she really?" I cried; and, "Have you seen her?" asked Pelleas; and, "How does she look?" we demanded together.

"No," Hobart said, "I've not seen her. I had a charming little note from her, full of nods. Now that I think of it," he went on leisurely, "Viola's charming little letters are always very like a bow from her. She never even waves her hand in them. She merely bows, in ink. I think I shall point out to her that if ever she is too busy to write letters she might send about her handkerchiefs, instead. One would tell quite as much as the other, and both suggest orris. . . ."

"Hobart Eddy," I begged impatiently, "where is Viola?"

"She is in Inglese-in-the-valley, with the Chartres," he told me. "Get your bonnet, dear, and a tremendous veil and come. I'll run like a tortoise-shell and you shall toot the horn."

I turned tremblingly to Pelleas for I had never been in a motor car. Lumbering electric hansoms and victorias had borne me, but the kneeling elephant was another matter. But Pelleas, being a man, is no more in awe of machinery than I am of chiffons; or than he is of chiffons; and he assented to Inglese quite simply.

"Very well, Hobart Eddy," I said, "I will go. You are charming to want us. But bear in mind that I reserve the right to insist that you are running too fast, block by block. And if anything goes wrong very likely I shall catch at the brake."

"I'll lead the thing by the bridle if you say so," he promised faithfully.

Presently we were free of the avenue, skimming the park, threading our way among an hundred excitements, *en route* to Inglese. Hobart Eddy was driving the machine himself and as I looked at his shoulders I found to my amazement that I was feeling a certain confidence. Hobart Eddy was one of the men whose shoulders — ah, well, it is among the hardships of life that one's best reasons are never

communicable. But I was feeling a certain confidence. And though a little alarm remained to prove me conservative I found myself also diverted. I remember trying when I was a child to determine at night in a thunder-storm which of me was frightened and which was sleepy and deciding that some of me was sleepy but all of me was frightened. And now, having come to a time of life when some terror should be a diversion, all of me was diverted though some of me was terrified. Hobart was running very slowly and glancing back at me now and then to nod reassuringly. The very sun was reassuring. The river and the Long Island ferry were reassuring. On such a day certainty is as easy as song. And by the time that we had reached the hills about Inglese I could have found it in my heart to telephone to Pelleas if he had been a block away: What a day. I love you.

Instead I sat quietly in the tonneau when, on the outskirts of the village, Hobart drew the car to the green crest of a little height. I found that the tonneau was geometrically in the one precise spot from which through pine- and fir-trees a look of the sea unrolled. Hobart is a perfect host and is always constructing these little altars to the inessential. On a journey Pelleas and he would remember to look out for the "view" as another man would think of trunk checks. But Pelleas and Hobart would

remember trunk checks too and it is this combination which holds a woman captive.

"And down there," said Hobart, looking the other way, "will be Viola of Inglese-in-the-valley. It sounds like an aria."

"I wonder," Pelleas observed on this, "whether Viola is still in love with our telephone. If I thought she was I should certainly take it out. I have never," Pelleas added conscientiously, "taken one out. But I think I could. I've often thought I could. And that should do for him — that young Greek youth *Telephone*."

"Her little nod of a letter," said Hobart, "seemed very content. So content that either she must have forgotten all about your telephone or else she had him at her elbow. They say there are those two routes to content."

Had Hobart himself found that first route, I wondered. For some years now we had seen him merely sitting out operas, handing tea, leading cotillions, and returning fans — urbane, complaisant, perfectly the social automaton. But always we had patiently hoped for him something gracious. Instead, had he merely found the content of some Forgetting? And if this was so he was in case still more sad than if he were unhappy. Either possibility grieved me. I am not unskillful with my needle and I found myself oddly longing to bring

to bear my embroidery silks and cottons upon Hobart Eddy's life. If only I might have embroidered on it a pattern of rosemary or heart's-ease—ay, or even the rue.

And suddenly I grasped the real situation. Here was Hobart for whom we longed to plan a concrete romance. And over there, in Inglese, was Viola come home again, grown wiser, more beautiful, and I had no doubt remaining as wholly lovable as before. And did I not know how willingly Madame Sally Chartres would have trusted the future of her little grandniece to Hobart Eddy? Was I not, in fact, in the secret of certain perfectly permissible ideas of Madame Sally's on the subject? Not plans, but ideas. Moreover, now that Viola was back in America there was once more the peril of that young *Telephone*. And if Pelleas and I had devised the matter we could have thought of no lady lovelier than Viola. I turned to telegraph to Pelleas and I found him in the midst of the merest glance at me. It was one of the glances which need no spelling. And it was in that moment as if between us there had been spoken our universal and unqualified, *Why not?*

"Hobart," said I, "you are very brave to go to Inglese. I have always thought that any man could fall in love with a woman named Viola."

But as for Hobart he serenely took one of the side paths which he is so fond of developing.

"I don't know," he said reflectively, "Viola begins with a V. I'm a bit afraid of V. V — 'the viol, the violet, and the vine.' V sounds," he continued, as if he enjoyed it, "such an impractical letter — a kind of apotheosis of B. Wouldn't one say that V is a sort of poet to the alphabet? None of the sturdiness of G — or the tranquillity of M — or the piquancy of K — or the all-round usefulness of E. I don't know, really, whether a woman who begins with V could be taken seriously. I think I should feel as if I were married to a wreath, or a lyre."

Any one save Pelleas and me would have been discouraged, but we are more than seventy years old and we understand the value of the quality of a man's indifference. Moreover, we believed that Hobart had a heart both cold and hot but that the cold side is always turned toward the sun.

"Ah," said I, "but Viola Chartres is another matter. She makes one *wish* to fall in love with a wreath, or a lyre."

"A man always ought," Hobart impersonally continued, "to marry a woman named Elizabeth Strong Davis or the like. Something that sounds primal — and finished. A sort of ballast-and-anchor name that one might say over in exigencies, like a golden text."

"Ah, well, now, I don't know," Pelleas submitted mildly, "'Etarre' sounds like Camelot and Astolat

and Avalon and so on to any number of unrealities. But it seems like a golden text to me."

I wonder that I could pursue my fixed purpose, that was so charming to hear. Perhaps it is that I have partly learned to keep a purpose through charming things as well as through difficulties, though this is twofold as hard to do.

"Women's names are wonderful things," Hobart Eddy was going tranquilly on. "They seem to be alive — to have life on their own account. I can say over a name — or I think I could say over a name," he corrected it, "to myself, and aloud, until it seemed Somebody there with me."

I looked at him swiftly. Did he mean that there was for him some such name? Or did he merely mean that he might mean something, other things being equal?

"That would be a good test," he added, "for one who couldn't make up his mind whether he was in love. And it would be a new and decorative branch of phonology. Why doesn't phonology," he inquired reasonably, "take up some of these wonderful things instead of harking back to beginnings?"

"Precisely," said I tenaciously, "and Viola —"

"'Who is Viola? What is she
That all our swains commend her?'"

he adapted, smiling.

"I've wondered," said I gravely, "that you haven't asked that of yourself before."

But having now effectually introduced the matter I looked about me helplessly. What were we to say to Hobart Eddy? To have embroidered a message with silks and cottons would have been a simple matter; but it is difficult to speak heart's-ease and rue. Moreover, it is absurd to impart one's theory of life without an invitation. Sometimes even by invitation it is absurd. If only one might embroider it, now! Or if one might merely indicate it, as Pelleas had said of the "Bird Book: Part Two," for keeping alive the thrill of a thing. . . .

At that our morning was back upon me, with its moment that was like revelation and prophecy and belief. Yet how to give to Hobart Eddy in effect: *A momentary knowledge that there is more about a bird and about what he is and about what we are than one commonly supposes.* How to tell him that some gracious purpose — like winning the love of Viola — would teach the secret? I longed unspeakably, and so, I know, did Pelleas, to be to him a "restorer of paths to dwell in" — a restorer of the path of In-the-Spring which we feared that he had long lost. Though, indeed, how should one ever lose that path which runs to the end of the world? I looked at Pelleas and surprised him in

the midst of the merest glance at me. And when he spoke I knew that he understood.

"Hobart," said he, "the grosbeaks are here. We saw them this morning."

Hobart Eddy nodded with an air of polite concern. "The Grosbeaks?" he said over, uncertainly. "Do — do I know them? I am so deuced forgetful."

"Ah, well, now," said Pelleas, "I don't know that they are on your list. But you are on theirs, if you care to be. I suggest that you make their acquaintance. They're birds."

Hobart looked startled. But Pelleas enjoys as much as any one being momentarily misunderstood and he smiled back at Hobart as if he were proud of his idiom.

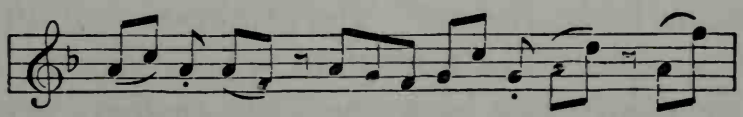
"I must get you to present me," Hobart seriously murmured.

"Do," Pelleas said with enjoyment. "Come over in the park with us any day now — though May and June are rather better. I never knew them come up from the South so early. Splendid family and all that," Pelleas added; "*Zamelodia Ludoviciana*, you know. Charming connections."

"O, I say," said Hobart, "what a jolly idiot I am! I thought you were in earnest, you know."

"I never was more in earnest in my life," Pelleas protested. "You really must see them. Little brown lady-bird with her gold under her wings. Male

with a glorious rose all over his breast and a song — Hobart, you should hear his song. It's a little like a robin's song, but all trilled out and tucked in and done in doubles and triplets and burrs — and a question at the end. You never heard one sing at night? You never went over in the park or out in the country to hear them sing at night? Etarre — do show him how it goes."

I have a fancy for singing the bird notes that we love and Pelleas, who could as easily hem a thing as to sing it, will in Spring keep me all hours at this pastime. Once he woke me in the night to reclaim the song of the orchard oriole — and next morning Nichola sorely discomfited me by observing that long after midnight she had heard owls in the chimney. But we persist in the delight and so now I sang for Hobart the song of the grosbeak: —

it goes," said I, "but the next one you hear may be quite — quite different! There is no tune to the song, ever — but exquisite rhythm. O, and such arch anxiety he is in, Hobart; you cannot think. And when he is done you've got to believe the way he does because of his little question which is never 'Do you think?' but always 'Don't you think?' Fancy your never having heard him."

"I say, you know," said Hobart, enthusiastically, "I'd like to hear him, most awfully."

"O you would — you would," I agreed, and could say no more. In Spring my heart is always aching for the busy and the self-absorbed who do not seize opera glasses and post away to some place of trees.

Pelleas was fumbling in his portmonnaie.

"Look here," he said beaming; "this is the list of the birds that we have seen this Spring. And we have not once stepped outside town, either."

Hobart took our list and knitted his brows over it.

"I know robins and bluebirds," he claimed proudly.

Pelleas nodded. "They are very nearly our dearest," he said, "like daisies and buttercups. But we love the others, too — the rose and orchid and gardenia birds, Hobart. The grosbeaks and orioles and tanagers. You can't think what a pleasure it is to see them come back one after another, as true to their dates as the stars — only now and then a bit earlier, for spice. The society columns in November are nothing in comparison — though of course they do very well. Yes, it's quite like seeing the stars come back every year. Etarre and I go to the park after breakfast for the birds and to the roof of the house after dinner for the stars. March and April are wonderful months for the constellations."

"O yes," said Hobart Eddy, "yes. The Great Dipper and the North star and the Pleiades. I always know those."

He was still holding the list, and Pelleas leaned forward and tapped on it, his face sparkling.

"Hobart," he said, "give us a day next week. Let us leave home at six in the morning and get out in the real country and *walk* in the fields. We'll undertake to show you the birds of this entire list! The hermit thrushes should be here by then — and I don't know but the wood pewees and the orioles, the season is so early. And of course no end of the warbler family. We will all take glasses and Etarre shall give us the bird songs and I dare say we'll see some nests. In the middle of the day we'll hunt flowers — I could have been certain that I saw violet columbine a bit back on this road. And by next week we won't be able to step for the rue anemone and the hepatica. You wouldn't mind not picking them, Hobart?" asked Pelleas, anxiously. "We're rather extreme when it comes to that, and we don't pick them, you know. You wouldn't mind that, I dare say?"

Hobart Eddy said: No. That he should not mind that.

"And then after dark we'll start home," Pelleas went on, "but long enough after dark so that we can walk on some open road and see the stars.

Orion will be done for by then," he recalled frowning. "Orion and Jupiter are about below the west by dark even now. But Leo is overhead — and the Dragon and Cassiopeia in the north — and Spica and Vega and Arcturus in the east. O, we shall have friends enough. It is now," said Pelleas, "forty-nine years that Etarre and I have watched for them every year. We began to study them the Summer that we were married. Forty-nine years and they have never failed us once. What do you think of that?"

Hobart folded our list and handed it back.

"Do you know," he said solemnly, "that I wouldn't know whether Hepatica was a bird or a constellation? Jove," he added, "what a lot of worlds."

As for me I sat nodding with all my might. Yes, what a lot of worlds.

"Will you give us a day, Hobart?" Pelleas repeated.

"With all my heart," Hobart Eddy said simply.

"We'll take Viola with us!" I cried then joyfully. "She knows all these things better than we."

"She does?" exclaimed Hobart. "At her age? I believe they have actually begun to educate people for living," he observed, "instead of for earning a living. I dare say lots of people know this kind of thing — people in cafés and cars and around, whom

one never suspects of knowing," he added thoughtfully.

Pelleas and I have sometimes said that of the most unpromising people: Perhaps after all they know the birds and wait for the stars to come back. Not that this would prove them good citizens. But neither do the most utilitarian faculties prove them so.

"I could fall in love with any woman who was so accomplished," said Pelleas, looking at Hobart and pretending to mean me.

"By Jove, so could I!" said Hobart, looking at me openly.

"Why, then," said I at this, meeting his eyes fairly, "I think that we may as well hurry on to Inglese."

He understood, and smiled at us.

"You dear fairy god-people," he said.

But I hugged our hope as we rolled away; and so, I know, did Pelleas.

No one was on the veranda at the Chartres villa, and we had seen no one in the grounds save a man or two working miracles by unwrapping rose-trees. Madame Sally Chartres, the servant told us, was gone in the town, and Miss Viola was walking by the lake. We would not have her summoned and Hobart, Pelleas, and I went down the slope of early green to the lake walk.

The day was mounting to noon. A Summer day will miss its high-tide expression because peace falls on it at noon; but the high noon of Spring is the very keystone of the bow from sun to sun. I remember once dreaming of music which grew more beautiful and came nearer, until I knew as I woke that I could bear it no longer and that another moment would have *freed* me. And,

"Pelleas and Hobart," I said now, "if to-day gets any lovelier, I think that none of us can bear it and that the bubble will burst and we shall be let *out*."

For I love to seem a little mad for the sake of the contrast of my own knowledge that I am sane.

"On a day like this," said Pelleas, "one hardly knows whether one is living it or reading it."

"If we *are* reading it," said I, seeming to glance at Hobart Eddy, "I hope that it will turn out to be a love story."

And it did — it did. We followed the curve of the walk past some flowering bushes and came on a bench, the kind of bench that rises from the ground at the mere footfall of two lovers. And there sat Viola, quite twice as lovely as when she had spent that week before our telephone on the landing, and beside her a Boy whose *rôle* no one who saw his face could doubt.

She was very lovely as she rose to greet us — indeed, Viola was one of those who prove the pro-

cession of the wild things and the stars to be an integral part of life. But now for her a new star had risen whose magnitude was unquestionable.

"Aunt Etarre!" cried Viola. "O, I am so glad to have you and Uncle Pelleas and Hobart know — *first.*"

And when she had presented her fine young lover and I had taken her in my arms, "You know," she murmured, "he is your telephone, dear. Do you remember Uncle Pelleas calling him *Telephone?*"

Indeed, I do not think that we caught his real name that morning at all. And as for Pelleas and me, who are the first to love a lover, we found ourselves instant partisans of that fine young telephone of ours, so to speak, now that we finally saw him face to face. And I remember noting with a reminiscent thrill that the flowering shrub beneath which we were standing was Forsythia; and so did Pelleas, who is delighted with coincidences and hears in them the *motifs* of the commonplace.

"I told you this morning, Etarre, that something pleasant was about to happen," he said with satisfaction.

"And so it has," said I happily — and met Hobart Eddy's eyes, fixed on mine and quite uncontrollably dancing.

On which I fell guiltily silent, and so did Pelleas. It is one of the hardships of life that it is impossible

to grieve with the loser and rejoice with the winner of the same cause.

When, some time after we five had lunched alone on the veranda, Viola and Our Telephone waved our car down the drive, Pelleas and I were not less disposed to silence. Running slowly through the grounds Hobart Eddy glanced back at us, and,

"Well?" he asked gravely.

Pelleas and I looked away over the lawns and said nothing.

"You've still got me on your hands, fairy god-people," said Hobart, and smiled angelically and quite without a shadow in his eyes.

"I know," muttered Pelleas then; "we seem to be miserable at this kind of thing."

And it did seem as if the path of In-the-Spring had eluded us.

Suddenly, with a great wrench, Hobart brought the car to a standstill. "Look! Look there! By Jove, there it is! Look at it go!" he cried like a boy. "What is it—O, I say, do you know what it is?"

We, too, had seen it — the joyous rise and curve of the wing of a scarlet tanager, flashing into flight, skimming a lawn, burning from the bough of a far sycamore.

"A tanager!" cried Pelleas and I together, and caught a moment of its song — its open, double-toned,

two-note and three-note song, a serene cradle melody borrowed from May.

"O, Jove!" said Hobart Eddy. "Hear him."

In the reeds by the lake the song sparrows were singing — we heard these too. But I think that Pelleas and I heard chiefly another voice which for the first time Hobart Eddy was hearing.

"What day next week could we go in the country, do you think?" Hobart asked as he started the car.

"Monday," suggested Pelleas promptly.

He had out his portmonnaie and the bird list and I saw what he wrote: —

April 29: Scarlet tanager. Etarre and Hobart and Pelleas.

And across the page: —

Part Two: Scarlet Tanager day: *Spent all day in the path of In-the-Spring.*

IV

THE ELOPEMENT

THE next morning Pelleas and I sat before our drawing-room fire talking over our amazing trip to Inglese.

"In that love affair of yesterday," Pelleas said sadly, "we were good for absolutely nothing."

"Ah, well, now," I protested feebly, "we chaperoned."

"Chaperons," Pelleas said sententiously, "are nothing, *per se*. Chaperons are merely the evidence that everything is not seen."

"At least," said I, "that arietta of the *Inutile Precauzione* gives great charm to 'The Barber.'"

"I know," Pelleas assented; "so does the property man. But I should like us to be really good for something on our own account. In some pleasant affair or other — I don't greatly care what."

I looked out the window at New York.

"Think," said I, "of all the people out there who are in love and who absolutely *need* our help."

"It is shocking," Pelleas assented gravely. "I could almost find it in my heart to advertise. How

should we word it? 'Pelleas and Etarre, Promoters of Love Stories Unlimited. Office Hours from Time to Eternity —'"

He broke off smiling, but not at any fancied impracticality.

"Why not?" said I. "The world needs us. You yourself said that the world is the shape of a dollar instead of a heart."

"Ah, I'm not so sure, though," Pelleas returned with an air of confidence. "We don't know the ways of the North Pole. Perhaps we shall yet find that the world *is* the shape of a heart."

"At all events," said I, "we can act as if it were. And no one now can possibly prove the contrary."

How would one act if the world were the shape of a heart? I was considering this seriously when, five minutes later, I selected with especial care a book to take to the park. I was going over alone that morning, for Pelleas was obliged to be downtown. This happens about three times a year, but the occasions are very important and Nichola and I make a vast ado over his departure and we fuss about until he pretends distraction, though we well know how flattered he is. Nichola even runs after him on the street with a newspaper to be read on the elevated, though we are all three perfectly aware that even with both pairs of spectacles he cannot possibly read on the jolting car. But he folds the

paper and thanks Nichola and, as I believe, sits with the paper spread before him all the way to Hanover Square.

On that particular morning Pelleas left very early, and I arrived in the park when it was not yet a playground and a place for loitering but a busy causeway for the first pedestrians. I found a favourite bench near a wilding mass of Forsythia, with a curve of walk and a cherry-tree in sight. There I sat with my closed book — for in the park of a Spring morning one need never open one's book providing only that the book shall have been perfectly selected. I remember that Pelleas once took down, as he supposed, a volume of well-beloved essays to carry with us and when we reached the park we found by accident that we had brought a doctor's book instead. It was such a glad morning that we had not intended to read, but we were both miserable until Pelleas went back to exchange it. I cannot tell how we knew but certain voices refused to sing in the presence of that musty, fusty volume. When he had returned with the well-beloved book they all drew near at once. Therefore we will not go even in the neighbourhood of the jonquil beds with a stupid author.

But on this morning of Spring my book was in tune and all the voices sang, so that they and the sun and the procession of soft odours almost lulled me

asleep. You young who wonder why the very dead do not awake in Spring, let me say that one has only to be seventy to understand peace even in May.

I was awakened by the last thing which, awake or asleep, one would expect to hear on such a morning; a sound which was in fact an act of high treason to be tried in a court of daffodils. It was a sob.

I opened my eyes with a start, expecting that a good fairy had planted some seeds which by having failed to come up on the instant had made her petulant. The sob, however, proceeded from a very human Little Nursemaid who sat at the extreme end of my bench, crying her eyes out. I could not see her face but her exquisitely neat blue gown and crisp white cap, cuffs and apron were a delight. She had a fresh pink drawn through her belt. Both plump hands were over her eyes and she was crying to break her heart. Her Little Charge sat solemnly by in a go-cart, regarding her, and dangling a pet elephant by one leg. The elephant, I may add, presented a very singular appearance through having lost large patches of its cloth and having been mended by grafting on selections from the outside of some woolly sheep.

I was in doubt what to do; but when I am not sure about offering my sympathy I always scan the victim to see whether she shows any signs of "niceness." If she does I know that my sympathy will not

come amiss. The sight of that fresh pink determined me: Little Nursemaid was "nice."

"My dear," said I, "what is it?"

This sounds as if I have no dignity. I have, up to the moment that some one cries, and then I maintain that dignity loses its point. There is a perfectly well-bred dignity which has hurt more hearts than ever sympathy has bound up, but you do not learn that until you are seventy and then no one listens to what you have learned.

Little Nursemaid showed me one eye, blue as her gown.

"Nothink, ma'am," she said shamelessly, and fell to sobbing anew.

"Nonsense," said I gently, "you are not crying for nothing, are you?"

Think of the times that all the women in the world require to have that said to them.

Little Charge whimpered slightly as if to say that he could cry all day if he chose, and only be scolded for his pains. He was doubtless justly aggrieved at my sympathy for a performance borrowed from his own province. Little Nursemaid pushed the go-cart with her foot, such a trim little well-shod foot, *without* openwork stockings.

"Tell me about it," I urged with even more persuasiveness. "Perhaps I could help you, you know."

She shook her head. No; nobody could help her.

"Is it that some one is dead?" I asked.

No; no one was dead.

"Well, then!" I exclaimed triumphantly, "that is all I need to know. Tell me — and we can do *something*, at any rate."

Bit by bit she told me, pulling at her trim little cuffs, twirling the head of the pink, rolling the go-cart until Little Charge smiled as upon an unexpectedly beneficent world.

And the trouble was — how, I wondered as I listened, could I ever have doubted that the world is the shape of a heart — the trouble was that Little Nursemaid had intended to elope that very day, and now she couldn't!

Cornelia Emmeline Ayres, for so she subsequently told me that she was called, was by her own admission pathetically situated.

"I am a orphan nursemaid, ma'am," she confessed, shaking her brown head in pleasant self-pity.

Briefly, she was living with a well-to-do family just off the avenue, who had cared for her mother in her last illness and had taken charge of Cornelia herself when she was a child. She had grown up in the family as that most pitiful of all creatures, an unpaid dependant, who is supposed to have all the advantages of a home and in reality has only its discomforts. Until a year ago the life of the little maid had been colourless enough, and then the Luminous

Inevitable happened. He was a young drug clerk. He had had two "rises" of salary within seven months, probably, I surmised, averaging some seventy-five cents each. And she had fourteen dollars of her own.

"Well, well," said I in bewilderment, "what more do you want? Why wait?"

"Oh, ma'am," sobbed Cornelia Emmeline, "it's the unthankfulness I'm bothered about. Why, She raised me an' I just can't a-bear to leave Her like this."

"What does She say about it?" I inquired, gathering from the reverential tone of the pronoun that the Shrewd Benefactress was in her mind. O, these women whose charity takes the form of unpaid servants who have "homes" in return.

"That's just it, ma'am. She won't hear to it," said Cornelia Emmeline sadly. "She says I'm too young to have the care of a home."

I looked at the stout proportions of Little Charge who had to be carried and lifted all day.

"So you planned to elope?" I tempted her on. "And why didn't you?"

Then her heart overflowed.

"We was to go to the church to-night," she sobbed. "Evan, he told the m-m-minister, an' I was goin' to wear my new p-p-plum-colour' dress, an' it was a-goin' to be at six-fifteen. Evan has a hour off at six. An' th-then th-this morning She gimme a

bright fifty cents an' a watered ribbin — an' O, ma'am, I just can't a-bear to go an' do it!"

So — Benefactress was even shrewder than I had thought.

"Have you told him?" I asked, feeling with Evan the hopelessness of competing with "a bright fifty cents an' a watered ribbin."

She nodded speechlessly for a moment.

"Jus' now," she burst out finally. "I went to the drug store an' told him. He d-d-didnt' say a word, but he jus' went on makin' a egg-phosphate, in a heartbroke way, for a ole gentleman. He never l-l-looked at me again."

I sat in sad silence going over the principal points of the narrative. Nothing makes me so sorrowful as the very ordinary sight of two young lovers juggling with their future. There are so few chances for happiness in every life, "and that hardly," and yet upon these irreverent hands are constantly laid, and all the hues despoiled. Thereafter the two despoilers are wont to proclaim happiness a bubble. I do not know if that be true, but say that it *is* a bubble. Is it not better to have so luminous a thing ever trembling over one's head than to see, through one's tears, its fragments float away? If happiness be a bubble, Pelleas and I know of one that has outlasted many a stouter element and will last to the end. Yet what can Seventy say of this to Seventeen? It can only

wring its hands, and Seventeen has but one answer: "But *this* is different!" I could have shaken Cornelia Emmeline had it not been for our brief acquaintance.

As I sat considering this and pulling at the fringe of my reticule, the last words that she had spoken began to assert themselves with a vague, new significance.

"He d-d-didn't say a word, but he jus' went on makin' a egg-phosphate, in a heartbroke way, for a ole gentleman," she had said. My attention had been so fixed on the image of Evan behind the counter that a supreme coincidence had escaped me.

I touched Cornelia Emmeline's arm — I have dignity, I repeat, but not in the face of such a sorrow as this.

"What drug store?" I inquired.

There was only one in the world for her, so she knew what I meant.

"How long ago were you there to tell him?" I asked next, breathlessly.

Cornelia Emmeline thought that it might have been a matter of twenty minutes.

"The very same!" I cried, and fell to smiling at Little Nursemaid in a fashion that would have bewildered her had she not been so occupied in wiping her eyes.

For who in the world should be the old gentleman of the egg-phosphate but Pelleas?

Had I not, morning after morning, waited in that very drug store, amusing myself before a glass case of chest-protectors while Pelleas drank his egg-phosphate which he loathed? And so that handsome, curly-headed, long-lashed youngster who fizzed and bubbled among his delicacies with such dexterity was none other than Evan! Why, indeed, he was a friend of Pelleas'. Pelleas had given him a red muffler of his own only last Christmas.

I do not know whether you have what I call the quality of making mental ends meet when you ought to be concerned with soberer matters. For myself, being a very idle and foolish and meddlesome old woman, I can not only make them meet but I can tie them into bowknots, veritable love knots. And so I did now, sitting there on the bench in the sunshine with the fragrance of Forsythia and cherry blossoms about, and my eyes fixed on the all-wool elephant of Little Charge. And yet, remembering now, I disown that plan; for I protest that it came pealing to me from some secret bell in the air — and what could I, a most unwise and helpless old woman, do against such magic? And how else could one act — in a world the shape of a heart?

"Don't you want to tell me," said I shyly, "how

you had planned your elopement? It will do no harm to talk about it, at any rate."

Little Nursemaid liked to talk about it. With many a sob and sigh she brought forth her poor little plans, made with such trembling delight and all come to naught. They were to have met that very night at precisely quarter-past six at the door of a chapel that I knew well. The curate had been engaged by Evan, and a "little couple" who lived over the drug store were to be witnesses. The new plum-colour' dress figured extensively and repeatedly in the account. Then they were to have marched straight and boldly to the Benefactress and proclaimed their secret, and Evan was to have been back behind the counter at seven o'clock, while Cornelia Emmeline would have been in time to put Little Charge to bed, as usual. The remainder of their lives, so far as I could determine, did not enter importantly into the transaction. The main thing was to be married.

And all this bright castle had toppled down before the onslaught of "a bright fifty cents an' a watered ribbin." Ah, Cornelia Emmeline! Yet she truly loved him — mark you, if I had not believed in that I would have left her to the solitary company of Little Charge and the all-wool elephant. But since I did believe in that I could not see those two dear little people make a mess of everything.

"It is too bad," said I innocently, "and let me tell you what I suggest. You'll be very lonely to-night about six o'clock — and you will probably cry and be asked questions. Don't you want to run down to my house for a few minutes to help me? I have something most important to do."

I had much trouble to keep from laughing at that "something most important to do."

Cornelia Emmeline promised readily and gratefully. She had always that hour to herself, it appeared, because then He came home — the husband of Benefactress, I inferred — and wanted Little Charge to himself before dinner. That was such a pleasant circumstance that I began to feel kindly toward even the Shrewd Benefactress and "Him." But I did not relent. I made Cornelia Emmeline promise, and I saw that she had my card tucked away for safe-keeping, and when we had talked awhile longer about the danger of unthankfulness, and the prospects of drug clerks, Little Charge suddenly straightened out stiffly in the gocart and demanded his "bread'n'butter'n'sugar." So she took him away and nodded me a really bright farewell; and when she had gone a few steps she came running back and shyly laid something on my knee. It was the fresh pink. After that you may be sure that I would have carried on my plan in the face of all disaster, save indeed the opposition of Pelleas.

But Pelleas is to be counted on in everything. He has failed me but once, and that was in a matter of a wedding which took place anyway and is therefore an incident which hardly counts against him. I could hardly wait for him to come home. I was at the window when he reached the steps, and before he could unbutton his greatcoat he knew the whole story. But Pelleas is not inventive. He is sympathetic, corroborative, even coöperative, but not inventive. To him the situation simply closed down.

"Poor little souls," he said ruefully, "now that is hard. So that young rascal is in love. I didn't know he ever thought of anything but soda. It's a blessing he didn't fix me up a chloroform phosphate this morning in sheer misery. Too bad, too bad. Won't matters ever be straightened out, do you think?"

"No later," said I, "than seven o'clock to-night."

"Bless my soul!" cried Pelleas. "How?"

I told him, quivering with the pleasant occupation of minding somebody else's affairs. Pelleas listened a little doubtfully at first — I have a suspicion that all men strive to convince you of their superior judgment by doubting, at first, every unusual project; all, that is, save Pelleas, whose judgment *is* superior. But presently as I talked a light began to break in his face and then he wrinkled his eyes at the corners and I knew that I had won the day.

"Will you, Pelleas?" I cried breathlessly.

"I will," Pelleas answered magnificently, "if I have to take three egg-phosphates in succession to win his confidence."

Nichola knew very well that something unusual and delightful was at harbour in the house that afternoon. For Pelleas and I found it impossible to read, and she kept coming in the room and finding us with our heads together. Nichola is one of those who suspect every undertone to mean a gigantic enterprise. I think, moreover, that she believes us wholly capable of turning the drawing-room into a theater with boxes, and presenting a comedy. Ah, well — that we may, as the days grow colourless.

At a little before six o'clock Pelleas set out, I figuratively dancing on the doorstep with excitement.

"Pelleas," I whispered him in the hall, "don't you fail! Pelleas, if you fail, attractive as you are, I shall be divorced from you!"

He smiled confidently.

"I feel as if we were eloping ourselves," he said, "and this is something like."

Before the clock had gone six Nichola ushered into the drawing-room Cornelia Emmeline Ayres. In one glance I knew that I had not counted on her in vain. To do honour to me she appeared in full regalia of plum colour. But she had been crying

all day — I saw that in the same glance, and her attempt to be cheerful in her sadness and shyness went to my heart.

We sat beside the fire where I could watch the clock, but it seemed to me as if the very hands were signaling to her what my plan was. Nichola came in with more coals, which we needed considerably less than more wall paper; but Nichola's curiosity is her one recreation and almost her one resource, as I sometimes think. I trembled afresh lest she knew all about this, as she did about everything else, and would suddenly face about on the hearth rug and recite the whole matter. She went out in silence, however, and had heard us discuss nothing but the best makes of go-carts, which was the matter that first presented itself to my mind.

"Now, my dear," said I, when we were alone, "haven't you thought better of it? Shall we not be married at fifteen past six, after all?"

She shook her head, and the tears started as if by appointment. No; we would not be married that night, it would appear.

"Nor ever?" I put it point-blank. "Evan won't wait forever, you know."

She looked forlornly in the fire.

"Not as long as She needs me around."

"Rubbish!" cried I, at this. "There are a thou-

sand nursemaids as good as you, I dare say — but there is only one wife for Evan."

"That's what he keeps a-sayin'," she cried, and broke down and sobbed.

The hands of the clock pointed rigidly at six. Then and there I cast the die.

"I wish to go for a walk," I said abruptly. "Will you give me your arm for a block or so?"

My bonnet was ready on the hall-table and I had kept the pink quite fresh to pin on my cloak. We were off in no time and went down the avenue at a brisk pace, while Nichola lurked about the area, pretending to sweep and really devoured with curiosity.

Cornelia Emmeline looked up longingly at all the big, beautiful homes, and down the cross-streets at all that impertinent array of comfort, so hopelessly professional, so out of sympathy with the amateur in domesticity.

"So many homes all fixed up for somebody else," she said wistfully.

My heart ached as I thought of all the little people, divinely in love, who have looked up at those grim façades with the same thought. Personally, I prefer a flat, but it takes one seventy years to learn even this.

I talked on as well as I could about little in particular and most of all I encouraged her to talk, since

I was becoming every moment more excited. For every step was bringing us nearer and nearer to the little chapel, and at last we rounded the corner and were full upon it. A clock in a near-by steeple showed six-fifteen. I looked anxiously up the street and the street was empty.

"Let us," said I, guilelessly, "go in here and rest awhile."

Little Nursemaid's mouth trembled.

"Oh, ma'am — no, please — not in there! I couldn't go in there *to-night*," she stammered.

"Nonsense!" said I sharply, pretending to be very cross. "I am tired and I must have rest."

She could do nothing but lead me up the steps, but her poor little face was quite white. So was mine, I suspect. Indeed, I fancy that neither of us could have borne matters very much longer. Happily there was no need; for when the double green doors had closed behind us there in the dim anteroom stood the faithful Pelleas and a bewildered Evan — who very naturally failed to understand why a strange old gentleman, whom he had hitherto connected only with egg-phosphates and one red muffler, should have decoyed him from his waiting supper to a chapel of painful association.

Pelleas and I are not perfectly agreed on what did happen next. For we had planned no farther than the church door, trusting to everything to come

right the moment that those two little people saw each other in the place of their dream. The first thing that I recall is that I fairly pushed Cornelia Emmeline into the arms of the young soda-fountain king, and cried out almost savagely: —

"Be married — be married at once! And thank the Lord that you love each other!"

"But She — what'll She —" quavered Cornelia Emmeline on a coat-lapel.

Then young Evan rose magnificently to the occasion. He took her little white face in his hands, kissed her very tenderly, and decided for her.

"Now, then, Sweetheart," said he, "so we will! And no more trouble about it!"

Little Nursemaid gave him one quick look — shy, beseeching, delicious — and glanced down.

"I've got on my plum-colour'," she consented.

Whereat Pelleas and I, who had been standing by, smiling and nodding like mandarins, turned ecstatically and shook hands with each other.

Evan, in the midst of all his bliss, looked at his watch. It was plain to be seen that Cornelia Emmeline had not put her trust in a worthless fellow.

"Six-twenty," said he; "I'll run across and get the minister. O," he turned to us helplessly, "what if he can't come — now?"

I shared his anxiety, being suspicious that in the event of a postponement the store of "bright fifty

cents and watered ribbins" might prove inexhaustible.

Then very leisurely the green baize doors swung open and without undue haste or excitement in walked the curate.

"Ah!" we four said breathlessly.

"Ah, my young friends," said the curate, and seemed to include us all — and at the time this did not impress me as impossible — "I have been until this moment detained at the bedside of a sick parishioner. I regret that I am five minutes tardy."

"Why, sir — why, sir —" stammered Evan, "we meant — we didn't mean —"

The curate looked his perplexity.

"Is this not the same?" he inquired, adjusting his pince-nez and throwing his head back. "Did you not make an appointment with me for six-fifteen to-day? Surely I have not mistaken the day?"

At this young Evan burst into a laugh that sorely tried the echoes of the anteroom.

"Bless me!" he cried, "if I ain't forgot to tell 'im not to come!"

So there we were, snug as a planned-out wedding with invitations and bells.

They were married in the vestry, and Pelleas and I had the honour of writing our names below theirs, and we both wiped our eyes right through the entire process in a fashion perfectly absurd.

"Parents of the —?" hesitated the curate, regarding us consultingly.

I looked at Pelleas in some embarrassment, and I think we felt that he was concealing something when he said simply: "No." Perhaps it would not have been legal or churchly had the curate known that we had never seen Cornelia Emmeline until that day and knew nothing of Evan save egg-phosphates.

On the steps of the chapel the two kissed each other with beautiful simplicity, and young Evan shook our hands with tears in his eyes.

"How — how come you to do it?" he asked, this phase of the hour having now first occurred to him.

"Yes," said Cornelia Emmeline, "I've been a-wantin' to ask."

Pelleas and I looked at each other somewhat foolishly.

"Bless you!" we mumbled together. "I don't know!"

Off went young Evan like a god to his star, and Cornelia Emmeline walked back with us, and we all waved our hands at the far end of the street. Then we left her at the door of the Shrewd Benefactress, and with broken words the dear little soul in her best plum-colour' went blithely to Little Charge and the all-wool elephant, and all the age was gold.

Pelleas and I walked soberly home.

"Suppose," said he darkly, "that they are minors?"

"I really don't care if they are," cried I, with great courage. "They have acted far less like minors than we have."

"Suppose —" he began again.

"Pelleas," I said, "how did you say that advertisement was to be? 'Pelleas and Etarre, Promoters of Love Stories Unlimited —'"

"Ah, yes, that's all very well," he insisted, "but suppose —"

"And who was it," I pursued, "who was half persuaded that the world is the shape of a heart?"

"I'm afraid it was I," Pelleas admitted then, shaking his head.

But I could see that his eyes were without remorse.

V

THE DANCE

I THINK that by then Pelleas and I had fairly caught the colour of Youth. For I protest that in Spring Youth is a kind of Lydian stone, and the quality of old age is proved by the colour which it can show at the stone's touch. Though perhaps with us the gracious basanite has often exceeded its pleasant office and demonstrated us to be quite mad.

Otherwise I cannot account for the intolerance of age and the love of youth that came upon us. I was conscious of this when after breakfast one morning Pelleas and I stood at the drawing-room window watching a shower. It was an unassuming storm of little drops and infrequent gusts and looked hardly of sufficient importance to keep a baby within-doors. But we are obliged to forego our walk if so much as a sprinkling-cart passes. This is so alien to youth that it always leaves us disposed to take exception and to fail to understand and to resort to all the ill-bred devices of well-bred people who are too inventive to be openly unreasonable.

As "What a bony horse," observed Pelleas.

"Not really bony," I said; "its ribs do not show in the least."

"It is bony," reiterated Pelleas serenely. "It isn't well fed."

"Perhaps," said I, "that is its type. A great many people would say that a slender woman —"

"*They're* bony too," went on Pelleas decidedly. "I never saw a slender woman who looked as if she had enough to eat."

"Pelleas!" I cried, aghast at such apostasy; "think of the women with lovely tapering waists —"

"Bean poles," said Pelleas.

"And sloping shoulders —"

"Pagoda-shaped shoulders," said Pelleas.

"And delicate pointed faces —"

"They look hungry, all the time, and bony," Pelleas dismissed the matter — Pelleas, who in saner moments commiserates me upon my appalling plumpness.

"There comes the butter woman," I submitted, to change the subject.

"Yes," assented Pelleas resentfully, finding fresh fuel in this; "Nichola uses four times too much butter in everything."

"Pelleas," I rebuked him, "you know how careful she is."

"She is," insisted Pelleas stubbornly, "extravagant in butter."

"She uses a great deal of oil," I suggested tremulously, not certain whether oil is the cheaper.

"Butter, butter, she spreads butter on the soup," stormed Pelleas. "I believe she uses butter to boil water —"

Then I laughed. Pelleas is never more adorable than when he is cross at some one else.

At that very moment the boy who was driving the butter woman's wagon began to whistle. It was a thin, rich little tune, a tune that *pours* slowly, like honey. I am not musical but I can always tell honey-tunes. At sound of it Pelleas' face lighted as if at a prescription of magic.

"Etarre — Etarre!" he cried; "do you hear that tune?"

"Yes," I said breathlessly.

"Do you remember —?"

"No," said I, just as breathlessly.

"It's the Varsovienne," cried Pelleas, "that we danced together the night that I met you, Etarre."

With that Pelleas caught me about the waist and hummed the air with all his might and whirled me down the long room.

"Pelleas!" I struggled. "I don't know it. Let me go."

For it has been forty years since I have danced or thought of dancing and I could not in the least remember the silly step.

Leaving me to regain my breath as best I might Pelleas was off up the room, around chairs and about tables, stepping long and short, turning, retreating, and singing louder and louder.

"You stood over there," he cried, still dancing; "the music had begun and I was not your partner — but I caught you away before you could say no, and we danced — *tol te tol te tol* —"

Pelleas was performing with his back to the hall door when it opened softly, and he did not hear. There stood Nichola. I have never before seen that grim old woman look astonished, but at sight of the flying figure of Pelleas she seemed ready to run away. It was something to see old Nichola taken aback. Our old servant is a brave woman, afraid of nothing in the world but an artificial bath heater which she would rather die than light, but the spectacle of Pelleas, dancing, seemed actually to frighten her. She stood silent for a full minute — and this in itself was amazing in Nichola, who if she went often to the theater would certainly answer back to the player talk. Then Pelleas faced the door and saw her. He stopped short as if he had been a toy and some one had dropped the string. He was frightfully abashed and was therefore never more haughty.

"Nichola," he said with lifted brows, "we did not ring."

Nichola remained motionless, her little bead eyes which have not grown old with the rest of her quite round in contemplation.

"We are busy, Nichola," repeated Pelleas, slightly raising his voice.

Then Nichola regained full consciousness and rolled her eyes naturally.

"Yah!" said she, with a dignity too fine for scorn. "*Busy!*"

Really, Nichola tyrannizes over us in a manner not to be borne. Every day we tell each other this.

Pelleas looked at me rather foolishly when she had disappeared.

"That was the way it went," said he, ignoring the interruption as one always does when one is nettled. "*Tol te tol te tol* —"

"Why don't you sing *da de da de da*, Pelleas?" I inquired, having previously noticed that all the world is divided into those who sing *tol*, or *da*, or *la*, or *na*. "I always say '*da*.'"

"I prefer '*tol*,'" said Pelleas shortly.

Sometime I intend classifying people according to that one peculiarity, to see what so pronounced a characteristic can possibly augur.

"Ah, well," said I, to restore his good humour, "what a beau you were at that ball, Pelleas."

"Nonsense!" he disclaimed, trying to conceal his pleasure.

"And how few of us have kept together since," I went on; "there are Polly Cleatam and Sally Chartres and Horace and Wilfred, all living near us; and there's Miss Lillieblade, too."

"That is so," Pelleas said, "and I suppose they will all remember that very night — our night."

"Of course," said I confidently.

Pelleas meditated, one hand over his mouth, his elbow on his knee.

"I wonder," he said; "I was thinking — I wouldn't be surprised if — well, why couldn't we —"

He stopped and looked at me in some suspicion that I knew what he meant.

"Have them all here some evening?" I finished daringly.

Pelleas nodded.

"And *dance!*" said he, in his most venturesome mood.

"Pelleas!" I cried, "and all wear our old-fashioned things."

Pelleas smiled at me speechlessly.

The plan grew large in our eyes before I remembered the climax of the matter.

"Thursday," I said below my breath, "Thursday, Pelleas, is *Nichola's day out!*"

"Nichola's day out" sounds most absurd to every one who has seen our old servant. When she came to us, more than forty years ago, she had landed

but two weeks before from Italy, and was a swarthy little beauty in the twenties. She spoke small English and was deliciously amazed at everything, and her Italian friends used to come and take her out once a week, on Thursday. With her black eyes flashing she would tell me next day, while she dressed me, of the amazing sights that had been permitted her. Those were the days when we had many servants and Nichola was my own maid; then gradually all the rest left and Nichola remained, even through one black year when she had not a centime of wages. And so she had grown gray and bent in our service and had changed in appearance to another being and had lost her graces and her disposition alike. One thing only remained the same: She still had Thursday evenings "out."

Where in the world she found to go now, was a favourite subject of speculation with Pelleas and me over our drawing-room fire. She had no friends, no one came to see her, she did not mention frequenting any houses; she was openly averse to the dark — not afraid, but averse; and her contempt for all places of amusement was second only to her distrust of the cable cars. Yet every Thursday evening she set forth in her best purple bonnet and black "circular," and was gone until eleven o'clock. Old, lonely, withered woman — where did she go?

Unless indeed, it was, as we half suspected, to take certain lessons in magic whereby she seems to divine our inmost thoughts and intentions.

And now for the first time we planned to make a base and harmless advantage of Nichola's absence. We meant to give a party, a *dance*, with seven guests. Nichola, we were certain, would not for a moment have supported the idea; she would have had a thousand silly objections concerning my sleeplessness and our nerves and the digestion of Pelleas. We argued that all three objections were inadequate, and that Nichola was made for us and not we for Nichola. This bold innovation of thought alone will show how adventuresome we were become.

We set about our preparation with proper caution. For one whole forenoon I kept Pelleas in the kitchen, as sentinel to Nichola, driving her nearly mad with his forced excuses for staying while I risked my neck among boxes long undisturbed. But then I love an attic. I have always a sly impulse to attempt framing ours for a wall of our drawing-room. I prefer most attics to some libraries. I have known houses whose libraries do not invite, but gesticulate; whose dining-rooms have an air of awful permanence, like a ship's dining-room; and whose drawing-rooms are as uninhabitable as the guillotine; yet above stairs would lie a splendid attic of the utmost distinction. These places always have chests which thrill

one with the certainty that they are filled with something — how shall I say? — something which does not anywhere exist: Vague, sumptuous things, such as sultans give for wedding gifts, and such as parcels are always suggesting without ever fulfilling the suggestion. Yet when chests like these are opened they are found to contain most commonplace matter — trunk straps with the buckles missing, printed reports of forgotten meetings called to exploit forgotten enthusiasms, and cotton wadding. Yet I never go up to our attic without an impulse of expectancy. I dare say if I persist I shall find a Spanish doubloon there some day. But that morning I found only what I went to seek — the lustrous white silk which I had worn on the night that I met Pelleas. We had looked at it together sometimes, but for very long it had lain unregarded and the fine lace about the throat was yellowed and it had caught the odour of the lonely days and nights. But it was in my eyes no less beautiful than on the night that I had first worn it.

I hid it away in my closet beneath sober raiment and went down to release Pelleas. When I entered the kitchen Nichola glanced at me once, and without a word led me to the looking-glass in the door of the clock.

"Yah?" she questioned suspiciously. "Is it that you have been tomboning about, building fires?"

I looked, wondering vaguely what Nichola can possibly mean by *tomboning*, which she is always using. There was a great place of dust on my cheek. I am a blundering criminal and should never be allowed in these choice informalities.

That afternoon while Nichola was about her marketing, Pelleas and I undertook to telephone to our guests. When I telephone I always close my eyes, for which Pelleas derides me as he passes; and when he telephones he invariably turns on the light on the landing. Perhaps this is because men are at home in the presence of science while women, never having been gods, fear its thunder-bolt methods. Pelleas said something like this to our friends: —

"Do you remember the ball at the Selby-Whitfords'? Yes — the one on Washington's Birthday forty-nine years ago? Well, Etarre and I are going to give another ball to the seven survivors. Yes — a ball. Just we seven. And you must wear something that you might have worn that night. It's going to be Thursday at eight o'clock, and it's quite a secret. Will you come?"

Would they come! Although the "seven survivors" did suggest a steamship disaster, our guests could have risen to no promise of festivity with greater thanksgiving. At the light that broke over Pelleas' face at their answers my heart rejoiced.

Would they come! Polly Cleatam promised for herself and her husband, although all their grandchildren were their guests that week. Sally Chartres' son, a stout, middle-aged senator, was with her but she said that she would leave him with his nurse; and Miss Willie Lillieblade cried out at first that she was a hermit with neuralgia and at second thought added that she would come anyway and if necessary be buried directly from our house.

The hall was dark and silent again when Nichola came toiling home and there was nothing to tell her, as we thought, what plans had peopled the air in her absence. Nor in the three days of our preparation did we leave behind, we were sure, one scrap or one breath of evidence against us. We worked with the delighted caution of naughty children or escaping convicts. Pelleas, who has a delicate taste in sweets, ordered the cakes when he took his afternoon walk and went back to the shop every day to charge the man not to deliver the things until the evening. My sewing woman's son plays the violin "like his own future," as Pelleas applauds him, and it was easy to engage him and his sister to accompany him. Meanwhile I rearranged my old gown, longing for Nichola, who has a genius in more than cookery. To be sure Pelleas did his best to help me, though he knows no more of such matters than the spirits

of the air; he can button very well but to hook is utterly beyond his simple art. However, he attended to everything else. After dark on Thursday he smuggled some roses into the house and though I set the pitcher in my closet I could smell the flowers distinctly while we were at dinner. It is frightful to have a conscience that can produce not only terrors but fragrances.

We were in a fever of excitement until Nichola got off. While Pelleas tidied the drawing-room I went down and wiped the dishes for her — in itself a matter to excite suspicion — and I broke a cup and was meek enough when Nichola scolded me. Every moment I expected the ice cream to arrive, in which event I believe I would have tried to prove to Nichola that it was a prescription and that the cakes were for the poor.

Pelleas and I waited fearfully over the drawing-room fire, dreading her appearance at the door to say her good-night; for to our minds every chair and fixture was signaling a radiant "Party! Party!" like a clarion. But she thrust in her old face, nodded, and safely withdrew and we heard the street door close. Thereupon we got upstairs at a perilous pace and I had on the white gown in a twinkling while Pelleas, his hands trembling, made ready too.

I hardly looked in the mirror for the roses had yet to be arranged. I gathered them in my

arms and Pelleas followed me down, and as we entered the drawing-room I felt his arm about my waist.

"Etarre," he said. "Look, Etarre."

He led me to the great gilt-framed cheval glass set in its shadowy corner. I looked, since he was determined to have me.

I remembered her so well, that other I who forty-nine years ago had stood before her mirror dressed for the Selby-Whitford ball. The brown hair of the girl whom I remembered was piled high on her head and fastened with a red rose; the fine lace lay about her throat and fell upon her arms, and the folds of the silk touched and lifted over a petticoat of lawn and lace. And here was the white gown and here the petticoat and tucker, and my hair which is quite white was piled high and held its one rose. The white roses in my arms and in my hair were like ghosts of the red ones that I had carried at that other ball — but I was no ghost! For as I looked at Pelleas and saw his dear face shining I knew that I was rather the happy spirit risen from the days when roses were not white, but merely red.

Pelleas stooped to kiss me, stooped just enough to make me stand on tiptoe as he always does, and then the door-bell rang.

"Pelleas!" I scolded, "and the roses not arranged."

"You know you wanted to," said Pelleas, shamelessly. And the truth of this did not in the least prevent my contradicting it.

Sally Chartres and Wilfred came first, Sally talking high and fast as of old. Such a dear little old lady as Sally is. I can hardly write her down "old lady" without a smile at the hyperbole, for though she is more than seventy and is really Madame Sarah Chartres, she knows and I know the jest and that she is just Sally all the time.

She threw off her cloak in the middle of the floor, her pearl earrings and necklace bobbing and ticking. At sight of her blue gown, ruffled to the waist and laced with black velvet, I threw my arms about her and we almost laughed and cried together; for we both remembered how, before she was sure that Wilfred loved her, she had spent the night with me after a ball and had sat by the window until dawn, in that very blue frock, weeping in my arms because Wilfred had danced so often with Polly Cleatam. And now here was Wilfred looking as if he had had no thought but Sally all his days.

In came Polly Cleatam herself presently in her old silk poplin trimmed with fringe, and her dimples were as deep as on the day of her elopement. Polly was nineteen when she eloped on the evening of her début party with Horace who was not among the guests. And the sequel is of the sort that should be

suppressed, but I must tell it, being a very truthful old woman and having once or twice assisted at an elopement myself: *They are very happy.* Polly is an adorable old lady; she has been a grandmother for nineteen years, and the Offence is Lisa's best friend. But whereas Sally and I have no idea of our own age Polly, since her elopement, has rebounded into a Restraining Influence. That often happens. I think that the severest-looking women I know have eloped and have come to think twice of everything else. Polly with an elopement behind her is invariably the one to say "Hush," and "I wouldn't."

Miss Willie Lillieblade was late. She came in wound in costly furs — Heaven provided her bank account in the neuter gender — and she stood revealed in a gorgeous flowered gown, new, but quite like the one which she had worn at the very ball that we were celebrating. Miss Lillieblade is tiny, and though her hair is quite white she seems to have taken on none of the graces of age. She has grown old like an expensive India-rubber ball, retaining some of her elasticity and constantly suggesting her former self instead of becoming another article altogether. She has adopted caps, not soft, black, old-lady caps, but perky little French affairs of white. She is erect — and she walks with a tall white staff, silver-headed, the head being filled with two kinds of pills though few know about that.

I fancy that we were in great contrast; for Miss Lillieblade is become a fairy-godmother-looking old lady; Polly Cleatam has taken on severity and poise and has conquered all obstacles save her dimples; Sally has developed into a *grande dame* of old lace and Roman mosaic pins; and I look for all the world like the plump grandmothers that they paint on calendars.

Pelleas and Wilfred and Horace talked us over.

"Ah, well now," said Wilfred, "they look not a day older than when we were married, and Miss Willie is younger than any one."

Wilfred, who used to be slim and bored, is a plump, rosy old gentleman interested in everything to the point — never beyond — of curiosity. O these youthful poses of languor and faint surprise, how they exchange themselves in spite of themselves for the sterling coin!

Horace beamed across at Polly — Horace is a man of affairs in Nassau Street and his name is conjured with as the line between his eyes would lead one to suspect; yet his eyes twinkled quite as they used before the line was there.

"Polly," he begged, "may I call you 'Polly' tonight? I've been restricted to 'Penelope,'" he explained, "ever since our Polly was born. Then after her coming out she demanded the Penelope, and I went back to the Polly I preferred. But now

our Polly-Penelope is forty, and there is a little seminary Polly who is Polly too, though I dare say the mite may rebuke us any day for undue familiarity. May I say 'Polly' now?"

Pelleas was smiling.

"I leave it to you," he said generously to every one, "to say if Etarre's hair was not white at our wedding? She has always looked precisely — but precisely! — the way she looks now."

Miss Willie Lillieblade sighed and tapped with her staff.

"Pooh!" said she. "Old married folk always live in the past. I'm a young thing of seventy-four and I've learned to live in the present. Let's dance. My neuralgia is coming back."

We had the chairs away in a minute, and Pelleas summoned from the dining-room the musicians — a Danish lad with a mane of straight hair over his eyes and his equally Danish sister in a collarless loose wool frock. They struck into the Varsovienne with a will and at the sound my heart bounded; and, Pelleas having recalled to me the step when Nichola was not looking, I danced away with Wilfred as if I knew how to do nothing else. Pelleas danced with Miss Willie who kept her staff in her hand and would tap the floor at all the impertinent rests in the music, while Pelleas sang "tol" above everything. Polly insisted on dancing alone — I suspect because her

little feet are almost as trim as when she wore one's — and she lifted her poplin and sailed about among us. Sally kept her head prettily on one side for all the world as she used, though now her gray curls were bobbing. Horace, who suffers frightfully from gout, kept beside her at a famous pace and his eyes were quite triangular with pain. "*Tol te tol te tol!*" insisted Pelleas, with Miss Willie holding her hand to her neuralgia as she whirled. I looked down at the figures on the carpet gliding beneath my feet and for one charmed moment, with the lilt of the music in my blood, I could have been certain that *now was not now, but then!*

This lasted, as you may imagine, somewhat less than three minutes. Breathless we sank down one by one, though Sally and Pelleas, now together and now alone, outdanced us all until we dreaded to think what the morrow held for them both. Miss Lillieblade was on her knees by the fire trying to warm her painful cheek on an andiron knob and laughing at every one. Polly with flushed face and tumbled hair was crying out: "O, but stop, Sally!" and "Pray be careful!" and fanning herself with an unframed water-colour that had been knocked from the mantel. We all knew for that matter that we would have to pay, but then we paid anyway. If one has to have gout and attendant evils one may as well make them a fair exchange for innocent

pleasure instead of permitting them to be mere usury. Pelleas said that afterward.

Sally suddenly laughed aloud.

"They think that we have to be helped up and down steps!" she said blithely.

We caught her meaning and joined in her laugh at the expense of a world that fancies us to have had our day.

"If we liked," said Miss Lillieblade, "I have no doubt we could meet here every night when no one was looking, and be our exact selves of the Selby-Whitford ball."

Horace smiled across at Polly.

"Who would read *them* to sleep with fairy stories?" he demanded.

Polly nodded her gray curls and smiled tenderly.

"And who would get my son, the senator, a drink of water when he cried for it?" gayly propounded Sally.

Pelleas and I were silent. The evenings that we spent together in the nursery were bitterly long ago.

"Ah, well," said Miss Lillieblade with a little sigh, "I could come, at any rate."

For a moment she was silent. "Let's dance again!" she cried.

We danced a six-step — those little people could play anything that we asked for — and then, to rest, we walked through a minuet, Pelleas playing a

double rôle. And thereafter we all sat down and shook our heads at the music and pretended to be most exhausted, and I was glad that the rest pretended for I really was weak with fatigue and so was Pelleas. For half an hour we sat about the fire, Miss Willie with her face constantly upon the andiron though she recalled more delightful things than anybody.

"Then there was Aunt Effié in Vermont," she had just said, her voice cracking deliciously on its high tones, "who cooked marvelously. And when the plain skirts came in she went about declaring that she would never have one that wasn't full, because she couldn't make a comforter out of it afterward!"

At that mention of marvelous cookery and in the laugh which followed, Pelleas and I slipped without. For we were suddenly in an agony of foreboding, realizing horribly that we had not once heard the area-bell ring. And if the ices and cakes had been left outside it would probably be true that by now they *had* gone to the poor.

The back stairway was dark for Nichola always extinguishes all the lower lights when she goes out. We groped our way down the stairs as best we might, Pelleas clasping my hand. We were breathing quickly, and as for me my knees were trembling. For the first time the enormity of our situation overcame me. What if the ices had not come? Or had

been stolen? What about plates? And spoons? Where did Nichola keep the best napkins? And after all Sally was Madame Sarah Chartres, whose entertainments were superb. All this flooded my spirit at once and I clung to Pelleas for strength.

"Pelleas," I murmured weakly, "did the ice-cream man promise to have it here in time?"

"He's had to promise me that every day since I first ordered it," Pelleas assured me cheerfully, "five or six times, in all."

"O," said I, as if I had no character, "I feel as if I should faint, Pelleas."

Three steps from the bottom I stood still and caught at his coat. Through the crack at the top of the door I could see a light in the kitchen. At the same moment an odour — faint, permeating, delicious, unmistakable — saluted us both. It was coffee.

Pelleas flung open the door and we stood making a guilty tableau on the lowest step.

The kitchen was brightly lighted and a fire blazed on the hearth. The gas range was burning and a kettle of coffee was playing its fragrant rôle. Plates, napkins, and silver were on the dresser; the boxes of ices were on the sill of the open area window; on the table stood the cakes, cut, and flanked by a tray of thin white sandwiches; the great salad bowl was ready with a little tray of things for the dressing; from a white napkin I saw protruding the leg of a

cold fowl; there was the chafing dish waiting to hold something else delectable. And in the rocking-chair before the fire, wearing an embroidered white apron and waiting with closed eyes, sat Nichola.

"O Nichola," we cried together in awed voices, "Nichola."

She opened an eye, without so much as lifting her head.

"For the love of heaven," she said, "it's 'most time. The coffee's just ready an' Our Lady knows you've been havin' a hard evenin'. Ain't you hungry, dancin' so? Well, go back upstairs, the both of you."

We went. In the dark of the stairway we clung to each other, filled with amazement and thanks-giving. We could hear Nichola moving briskly about the kitchen collecting her delicacies. How *had* she found us out? O, and now at last was not the secret of her mysterious Thursday evenings revealed to us? She did go somewhere for lessons in magic and she had learned to read our inmost thoughts!

From above stairs came the laughter of the others, echoes of that ancient ball which we had been pretending to re-live, trading the empty past for the largess and beauty of now.

Pelleas slipped his arm about me to help me up the stairs.

"Etarre," he said, "I am glad that now is now — and not then!"

VI

THE HONEYMOON

I HAVE often deplored that unlucky adjustment which allotted to the medicines, countries, flavouring extracts, and the like, names which should have been reserved for women. For example what beautiful names for beautiful women are Arnica, Ammonia, and Magnesia; as for Syria, one could fall in love with a woman called Syria; and it would be sufficient to make a poet out of any lover to sit all day at the feet of a woman named Vanilla.

This occurred to me again as a fortnight later Pelleas and I took our seats in the train for the sea, since across the aisle sat a pale and pretty little invalid girl whose companions called her "Phenie." I do not know what this term professed to abbreviate, but I myself would have preferred to be known by the name of some euphonious disease, say Pneumonia. Monia would make a very pretty love-name, as they say.

Our little neighbour should have had a beautiful name. She looked not a day past ten, though I learned that she was sixteen; and she was pale and

spiritless, but her great dark eyes were filled with the fervour which might have been hers if life had been more kind. She had a merry laugh, and a book; not what I am wont to call a tramp book, seeking to interest people, but a book of dignity and parts which solicits nobody, a book which may have a bookplate under its leather wing.

I puzzled pleasantly over the two in whose charge she appeared to be and finally I took Pelleas in my confidence.

"Pelleas," said I, "do you think that those two can be her parents?"

"Bless you, no, dear," he answered; "they are not old enough. She is more likely to be sister to one of them. They are very much in love."

"I noticed," I agreed; "they must be old-young married people."

"Instead of young-old married people like us," Pelleas said.

For Pelleas and I, merely because we are seventy and white-haired and frightened to cross streets, are not near enough to death to treat each other so coldly as do half the middle-aged. I cannot imagine a breakfast at which we two would separate the morning paper and intrude stocks and society upon our companionship and our omelet. At hotels I have seen elderly people who looked as if breakfast could a prison make and coffee cups a cage. Pelleas and

I are not of these, and we look with kindly eyes upon all who have never known that youth has gone, because love stays.

So we were delighted when we saw our old-young married people and the little invalid preparing to leave the train with us. When we drew into our station the big kindly conductor, with a nasturtium in a buttonhole, came bearing down upon Little Invalid and carried her from the car in his vast arms and across the platform to a carriage. And we, in a second carriage, found ourselves behind the little party driving to the sea.

I had been so absorbed in our neighbours that until the salt air blew across our faces I had forgotten what a wonderful day it really was to be. Pelleas and I were come alone to the seaside with no one to look after us and no one to meet us and we meant to have such a holiday as never had been known. It came about in this wise: —

We were grown hungry for the sea. All winter long over our drawing-room fire we had talked about the sea. We had pretended that the roar of the elevated trains was the charge and retreat of the breakers and we had remembered a certain summer years before, when — Pelleas still being able to model and I to write so that a few were deceived — we had taken a cottage having a great view and no room, and we had spent one of the summers which

are torches to the years to follow. Who has once lived by the sea becomes its fellow and it is likely to grow lyric in his heart years afterward and draw him back. So it had long been drawing Pelleas and me until, the Spring being well advanced, we had risen one morning saying, "We must go to-morrow."

We had dreaded confessing to Nichola our intention. Nichola renounces everything until her renunciations are not virtue but a disease. She cannot help it. She is caught in a very contagion of renunciation, and one never proposes anything that she does not either object to or seek to postpone. When the day comes for Nichola to die it has long been my belief that she will give up the project as a self-indulgence. Therefore it was difficult for us to approach her who rules us with the same rod which she continually brandishes over her own spirit. It was I who told her at last; for since that day when Nichola came upon Pelleas trying to dance, he has lost his assurance in her presence, dislikes to address her without provocation, and agrees with everything that she says as if he had no spirit. I, being a very foolhardy and tactless old woman, put it to her in this way: —

"Nichola! Pelleas and I are going to the seashore for all day to-morrow."

"Yah!" said Nichola derisively, putting her gray moss hair from her eyes. "Boat-ridin'?"

"No," said I gently, "no, Nichola. But we want the sea — we need the sea."

Nichola narrowed her eyes and nodded as if she knew more about the sea than she would care to tell.

"Oh, well," she said with resignation, "I s'pose the good Lord don't count suicide a first-class crime when you're old."

"We shall want breakfast," I continued with great firmness, "at half after six."

"The last breakfast that I'll ever have to get you," meditated Nichola, turning her back on me. The impudent old woman believes because she is four years younger than I that she is able to look after me. I cannot understand such self-sufficiency. I am wholly able to look after myself.

Pelleas and I dreamed all that night of what the morrow held for us. We determined to take a little luncheon and, going straight to the beach and as near to the water as possible, lie there in the sand the whole day long.

"And build sand houses and caves with passages *sidewise*," said Pelleas with determination and as if he were seven.

"And watch the clouds and the gulls," said I.

"And find a big wave away out and follow it till it comes in," Pelleas added.

"And let the sand run through our fingers — O, Pelleas," I cried, "I think it will make us young."

So the sea spoke to us and we were wild for that first cool salt breath of it, and the glare and the gray and the boom of the surf. But Nichola, to whom the sea is the sea, bade us good-bye next morning with no sign of relenting in her judgment on us.

"Well packed with flannel?" she wanted to know. And we went out in the street feeling like disobedient children, undeserving of the small, suggestive parcel of lunch which at the last moment she thrust in our hands.

"After all," Pelleas said, "what is it to Nichola if we get drowned or run over?"

"Nothing," we agreed with ungrateful determination.

Yet when we reached our station we had become so absorbed in Little Invalid that the sea had almost to pluck us by the sleeve before we remembered.

It was early for guests at the hotel and but few were on the veranda. Little Invalid was lifted from her carriage and placed in a rocking-chair while the old-young married people went in the office. And when Pelleas suggested that I rest before we go down to the beach I gladly assented and sat with him beside the little creature, who welcomed me with a shy smile. She was so like a bird that I had almost expected her to vanish at my approach; and when she did not do so the temptation to talk with her was like the desire to feed a bird with crumbs from my hand.

"It is pleasant to be near the sea again," I said to her, by way of crumbs.

Her eyes had been fixed on the far blue and they widened as she turned to me.

"'Again'?" she repeated. "I haven't ever seen it before, ma'am."

"You have not?" I said. "What a sorrow to live far from the sea."

She shook her head.

"No," she said, "I live in New York — we all three have lived in New York always — but I never saw anything of the sea, only from the Battery. None of us has but Henny. Henny has been to Staten Island."

I was silent in sheer bewilderment. Then it was true; there are people living in New York who have never seen the sea.

Something else trembled on Little Invalid's lips and out it came, hesitating.

"Bessie an' Henny's married last week," she imparted shyly, touching a great coloured button picture of Bessie upon her waist. "This is their honeymoon."

"O," I observed, brightening, "then you will be here for some time. I am so glad."

Again she shook her head.

"O, no, ma'am," she answered, "we're going back to-night. This is Henny's day off, but Bessie,

she wouldn't come without me. She's my sister," said Little Invalid proudly; "she paid my way herself."

Was it not wonderful for an old woman whose interests are supposed to be confined to draughts and diets to be admitted to such a situation as this? I was still speechless with the delight of it when the old-young married people came outside.

Bessie, the sister to Little Invalid and the bride of a week, was a gentle, worn little woman in the thirties, of shabby neatness, and nervous hands wide and pink at the knuckles, and a smile that was like the gravity of another. "Henny" — I perceive that my analogy extends farther and that some men would better have been christened Nicotine or Camphor — Henny was a bit younger than she, I fancied, and the honest fellow's heavy, patched-looking hands and quick, blue eyes would immediately have won my heart even if I had not seen the clumsy care that he bestowed upon Little Invalid, as though a bear should don a nurse's stripes.

Pelleas says that I spoke to them first. I dare say I did, being a very meddlesome old woman, but the first thing that I distinctly recall was hearing Henny say: —

"Now, you run along down the beach, Bess, an' I'll sit here a spell with Phenie!"

"I'm sure I'd be all right all alone," protested Little Invalid feebly, looking nervously about at the

fast-gathering groups of chattering people. However Bessie and Henny seemed to know very much better than this, and with her smile that was like gravity Bessie moved reluctantly away.

Fancy that situation. Little Invalid could not be carried to the sands, and those two old-young married people meant to spend their "honeymoon" in taking turns at visiting the beach. I looked at Pelleas and his face made the expression which means an alarm, for something to be done at once.

"Why," I asked casually, "don't you both go down to the beach and let us sit here awhile?" For to tell the truth the journey by the train had tired me more than I cared to confess.

I remember how Pelleas once sent two incredibly dirty little boys into the circus at the Garden, and save then I really think that I never saw such sudden happiness in the face of any one.

"Were — were you goin' to sit here anyway, ma'am?" Bessie asked, trying as heroically to conceal her joy as if it had been tears.

"Yes," I assured her shamelessly, and really I was over-tired. "Stay as long as ever you like," I said.

"O, ma'am," said Henny with shining eyes, "thank you! And thank you, sir!"

"Pooh!" said Pelleas gruffly and thrust my sunshade in his hands.

Off they went down the beach, Shabby Neatness hanging on her husband's arm in a fashion which I cannot call deplorable, and her husband looking down at her adoringly. Before they disappeared past the pavilion we all waved our hands. And then to my amazement I saw tears on the face of Little Invalid.

"O, ma'am," she said, her lips trembling, "you don't know what this will mean to them — you don't know!"

"Let me see your book, my dear," I said hastily, ashamed enough to be praised for indulging my own desire to rest.

She handed the distinguished-looking little volume and I saw that it was a very bouquet of sea poems, sea songs, sea delight in every form. Beloved names nodded to me from the page and beloved lines smiled up at me.

"The settlement lady lief me take it," said Little Invalid.

Then began an hour whose joy Pelleas and I love to remember. It would have been pleasure merely to sit in that veranda corner within sound of the sea and to hear Pelleas read those magic words; but we had a new and unexpected joy in the response of this untutored little maid who was as eager as were we. With her eyes now on the sea, now on the face of Pelleas as he read, now turned to me with the swift

surprise of something that his voice held for her, she sat breathlessly between us; and sometimes when a passage had to be explained her eyes were like the sea itself with the sun penetrating to its unsounded heart.

"Oh," she would say, "was it all there all the time — was it? I read it alone but I didn't know it was like this!"

It puzzled her to find that what we were reading had been known and loved by us for very long.

"Did the settlement lady lief you have the book, too?" she asked finally.

"No," we told her, "we have these things in other books, ourselves."

"Why, I thought," she said then in bewilderment, "that there was only one book of every kind. And I thought how grand for me to have this one, and that I'd ought to lend it to people who wouldn't ever see it if I didn't. Is there other ones like it?" she asked.

Gradually the shy heart opened to us and we spoke together of the simple mysteries of earth. For example Little Invalid knew nothing of the tides and the moon's influence, and no triumph of modern science could more have amazed her. Then from the terrifying parlour of the hotel we brought to her pieces of coral and seaweed, and these she had never seen and she touched them with reverent

fingers. In the parlour too was an hourglass filled with shining sand — it was like finding jewels in the coal bin to extract things of such significance from that temple of plush and paper flowers. She held the coral and the seaweed and the hourglass while we went back to the little book or sat watching the waves, gray-green, like the leaves of my moth geranium.

In this manner two hours had passed without our suspecting when, flushed and breathless, Bessie and Henny reappeared. They were very distressed and frightened over having stayed so long away, but no degree of embarrassment could disguise their happy possession of those two hours on the white beach.

Pelleas beamed on them both.

"Ah, well, now," he said, "we couldn't think of going away down there before luncheon. Run along back, but mind that you are here by one o'clock. You are to lunch with us."

At that my heart bounded, though I knew very well that Pelleas had intended certain five dollars in his portemonnaie for far other and sterner purposes. Yet it is a great truth that the other and sterner purposes are always adjusted in the end and the commonwealth goes safely on no matter how often you divert solitary bills to radiant uses with which they have no right to be concerned. Being I dare say a very

spendthrift old woman I cannot argue matters of finance, but this one principle I have often noted; and I venture to believe that the people who omit the radiant uses are not after all the best citizens. I write this in defence of Pelleas, whose financial conscience troubled him for many a day on account of that luncheon.

So back those old-young married people went to the beach, trying hard, as I could see, not to appear too delighted lest Little Invalid feel herself a burden to us all. And when they returned at one o'clock with bright eyes and cheeks already beginning to tan, Pelleas marshaled us all to a table by a window toward the sea, and a porter drew Little Invalid's chair beside us.

What a luncheon was that. Time was — when Pelleas was still able to model and I to write so as to deceive a few — that we have sat at beautiful dinner tables with those whose jests we knew that we should read later, if we outlived them, set in the bezel of a chapter of their biographies — and such a dinner is likely to give one a delicious historic feeling while one is yet pleasantly the contemporary of the entrée. Time has been too when a few of us have sat about a simple board thankful for the miracle of that companionship. But save the dinners which Pelleas and I have celebrated alone I think that there never was another such dinner in our history. When his

first embarrassment was gone we found that Henny had a quiet drollery which delighted us and caused his wife's eyes to light adoringly. They said little about themselves; indeed, save for the confidences of Little Invalid, we knew when we parted nothing whatever about them, and yet we were the warmest friends. However, it was enough to have been let into that honeymoon secret.

And what a morning had those two had. I cannot begin to recount what experiences had been theirs with great waves that had overtaken them, with dogs that had gone in after shingles, and with smooth stones and "angel-wing" shells and hot peanuts of which they had brought a share to Little Invalid. I cannot recall what strange people they had met and remembered. Above all I cannot tell you how they had listened to that solemn beat and roar, and would try to make us know its message — of course they did not know that this was what they tried to tell us, but Pelleas and I understood well enough.

After luncheon when Little Invalid was back on the veranda, her cheeks flushed with the unwonted excitement — it was her first dinner in a real hotel, she told me — Pelleas leaned against a pillar with an exaggerated air which I could not fathom, until: —

"Really," he said, "I'm so very sleepy that I'm going to settle myself in this big chair for a doze.

Don't you want to rest for a little, Etarre? Suppose that we three all have a long quiet nap and you two young people get back to the beach for a while so as not to bother us."

Bless Pelleas. And I confess that I was not unwilling to rest. So the two went away again, and I believe that Pelleas did sleep; but Little Invalid and I, though we pretended to be asleep, sat with our heads turned away from each other, staring out to sea. I do not know how it may have been with her, but as for me I was happy out of all proportion to the encouragement of that noisy veranda. Perhaps it was the look of the sea line, pricked with sails, or the mere rough, indifferent touch of the salt wind.

Presently we all pretended to wake and talk a little; and then we saw Bessie and Henny coming back and at a sign from Pelleas we all shut our eyes again, though Pelleas appeared to awake very crossly and bade them go back and not disturb us unless they wanted to be great nuisances. So they ran back, and we laughed at them in secret, and Little Invalid sat happily holding the mysterious hourglass. And then a band began to play in the pavilion — a dreadful band I thought until I saw the ecstatic delight of Little Invalid, whereupon I discovered that there was a lilt in its clamour.

When the bathers went in we found a glass for her, and she spent a pleasant half hour watching the

ropes. And twice more Bessie and Henny came back and both times we pretended to be asleep, and Pelleas awoke more testily each time and scolded them back. The second time he thrust something in their hands.

"Just pitch this in the ocean," he said crossly, "or eat it up. It worries me."

Secretly I looked from one eye and saw Nichola's lunch disappearing.

When they came back at six o'clock we consented to be awake, for it was time for Pelleas and me to go home. They stood before us trying with pleasant awkwardness to make us know various things, and Little Invalid kept tightly hold of my fingers. When I bent to kiss her good-bye she pressed something in my hand, and it was the great coloured button-picture of Bessie.

"Keep it," she said, "to remember us by. There ain't nothink else fit to give you!"

Henny handed me to the carriage in an anguish of polite anxiety, and they all three waved their hands so long as we could see them. They were to stay two hours longer and finish that honeymoon.

As Pelleas and I drove up the long street, our backs to the sea, we turned for one look at the moving gold of it under the falling sun. We felt its breath in our faces for the last time — well, who knows? When one is seventy every time may be the last time, though indeed I should not have been surprised to

find us both sea-bathing before the Summer was over.

Pelleas looked at me with troubled eyes.

"Etarre," he said, "I am afraid that we have indulged ourselves shamefully to-day."

"You mean about the luncheon party?" I asked.

"Yes, that," he said, "and then we came down here for the sea to do us good and we haven't been near the sea."

"No," I said, "we haven't."

"We have simply amused ourselves all day long," he finished disgustedly.

"Yes," I said, "we have."

But as the train drew over the salt marshes I smiled at this disgust of Pelleas', smiled until my hand crept down and found his under his hat.

"What is it?" he asked, seeing my smile.

"I've found out something," I told him.

"What is it?" he wanted to know.

"It wasn't their honeymoon so much," I said triumphantly, "as it was ours."

As we came through the long cross street toward our house we had a glimpse of Nichola beside our area gate, watching for us. But when we reached the gate she was not in sight and though we waited for a moment on our steps she did not come to open the door. It was not until Pelleas had lighted the

fire in the drawing-room and we sat before it that we heard her coming up the stairs.

She brought us tea, neither volunteering a word of greeting nor, save by a word and with averted eyes, responding to ours. But as she was leaving the room she stood for a moment in the doorway.

"How'd your lunch go?" she demanded.

Instantly Pelleas and I looked at each other — we never can remember not to do that. What *had* Nichola given us in that lunch?

"Why, Nichola," said I, "Nichola, your lunches are always — that is, I never knew your lunches not to be —"

"You are a wonderful cook, you know, Nichola," said Pelleas earnestly.

Nichola looked down upon us, her little eyes winking fast, and she nodded her old gray head.

"Yah!" she said, "what I put in it was fruit an' crackers. An' I see you've give it away."

"O, Nichola —" we began. But as captain of the moment she would not sally forth to parley.

"There's your tea," she cut us short; "drink it — if you ain't drownded an' your shades settin' here instead."

Pelleas looked up bravely.

"I'm not sure about myself, Nichola," he said gently; "one never is sure about one's self, you know. But this lady is real, I do assure you!"

"And this, Nichola," said I, gayly, "I protest is a real gentleman!"

On which we two laughed in each other's eyes; and Nichola, that grim old woman, said sharply: —

"Our Lady knows you talk enough nonsense to be new-married, the both."

She clicked the portière rings, like little teeth. And at her words Pelleas and I looked at each other in abashment. Does all the world, like Nichola, guess at our long honeymoon?

VII

THE OTHER TWO

PELLEAS has a little niece who when she sits in my room in the sun combing her brown hair looks like a mermaid. I told her this when on the morning after our return from the seashore she arrived to make us a visit and came to sit in my sunny window with her hair all about her shoulders drying from its fragrant bath.

"Lisa," I said, for the sea was still in my soul, "if I might tie your hair back with a rainbow and set you on a tall green and white wave you would be a mermaid. And by the way," I added, "perhaps you can tell me something about which I have always wondered: How the mermaids in the sea pictures keep their hair so dry?"

For answer Lisa smiled absently and spread a soft strand into shining meshes and regarded it meditatively and sighed dolorously. But Lisa was twenty, and Twenty is both meditative and dolorous, so I went on tranquilly laying satchets in my old lace; for at seventy I have sunk some of my meditation and all my dolour in such little joys as arranging my one

box of rare old lace. That seems a small lesson for life to have taught, and yet it was hard to learn.

"I rather think she was Latona's brood,
And that Apollo courted her bright hair—"

I was murmuring, when Lisa said:—

"Aunt Etarre, were you ever in love?"

Is it not notable what fragrance floats in the room when that question is asked? Of course it may have been the orris in my hands, but I think that it was more than this.

"If forty-nine and three quarters years of being in love," I reminded her, "would seem to you fair proof that I—"

"O, that kind," Lisa said vaguely. "But I mean," she presently went on, "were you ever in love so that you were miserable about everything else, and you thought all the time that somebody couldn't possibly love you; and so that seeing the postman made your heart beat the way it used to at school exhibition, and so that you kept the paper that came around flowers. . . ."

Lisa saw me smiling — not at her, Heaven forbid — but at the great collection of rubbish in the world saved because somebody beloved has touched it, or has seen it, or has been with one when one was wearing it.

"I mean were you ever in love like that, Aunt Etarre — were you?" Lisa put it wistfully.

"Ah, well now, yes indeed," I answered; "do you think that my hair was always straight on rainy days, as it is now?"

Lisa sighed again, even more dolorously, and shook her head.

"It couldn't have been the same," she murmured decidedly.

Poor, dear Twenty, who never will believe that Seventy could have been "the same." But I forgot to sigh for this, so concerned I was at this breaking of Lisa's reticence, that enviable flowery armour of young womanhood. So I waited, folding and refolding my Mechlin, until I had won her confidence.

He was, it developed, a blessed young lawyer, with very long lashes and a high sense of honour inextricably confused with lofty ideals and ambitions and a most beautiful manner. He was, in fact, young Eric Chartres, grandnephew to my dear Madame Sally Chartres. The sole cloud was the objection of Dudley Manners, Lisa's guardian, to the friendship of the two on the hackneyed ground of their youth; for Eric, I absently reckoned it aloud, was one year and five months older than Lisa.

"But it isn't as if he hadn't seen the world," Lisa said magnificently. "He has been graduated from college a year, and he has been abroad twice — once when he was nine, and then for two months last Summer. And he has read everything — O

Aunt Etarre," said Lisa, "and then think of his loving me."

"When am I going to meet him?" I asked, having exchanged with him only a word in a crowded room or two. As I expected Lisa flung herself down at my knee and laid her hands over the old Mechlin.

"O would you — would you? Uncle Dudley said he would trust me wholly to you and Uncle Pelleas. Might he call — might he come this afternoon?"

"The telephone," said I, "is on the landing."

Below stairs I told Pelleas about it and he sighed and looked in the fire and said, "Bless me, I used to wheel her mother about in a go-cart!"

"Pelleas," said I, thoughtfully, "I have seen that young Eric Chartres only once or twice in a crowded room, but do you know that I thought he looks a little — just a very little — as you looked at his age?"

"Does he really?" Pelleas asked, vastly pleased, and "Pooh!" he instantly added to prove how little vanity he has.

"He does," I insisted; "the first time I caught sight of him I could have believed —"

Pelleas turned to me with a look almost startled.

"Do you know," he confessed, "more than once when I have looked at Lisa — especially Lisa in that gown with flowers in and the *spingley* things

that shine," described Pelleas laboriously, — "I could almost have thought that it was you as you used to be, Etarre. Yes — really. There is something about the way that she turns her head —"

"And so Eric Chartres may call?" said I eagerly, with nothing but certainty.

"Of course he may call," Pelleas said heartily; "any fine fellow who is honestly in love is as welcome here as a king."

"Then," I continued, making a base advantage of his enthusiasm, "let us go down together and tell Nichola to have tea, served in her best fashion, at five this afternoon."

Pelleas looked doubtful. "She's making raised doughnuts," he demurred.

"But," I reasoned, "her tea rose bloomed yesterday. She is bound to believe in a beautiful thing or two. Let us risk it."

Nichola was picking her doughnuts from the hot lard as delicately as if she had been selecting violets for essences near her native Capri. She did not deign to turn or to speak as we slipped in at the door. Even when Pelleas had put the case to her, diplomatically dwelling on the lightness of the delicacies desired, she did not reply until she had brought to the table a colander of her hot brown dainties. Then she rested her hands on each side of the pan and leaned forward. As I looked at her, her gray

hair brushed smoothly back from her rugged face, her little eyes quick-winking — as if the air were filled with dust — I caught on her face an expression which I have seldom seen there: a look as if her features were momentarily out of drawing; as if, say, old Nichola's face were printed on cloth and the cloth had been twitched a bit awry.

"Who's a-comin'?" she demanded; but if Nichola were to ask to see our visiting list I think that we should hardly deny her.

"It's a friend of Miss Lisa's," Pelleas explained.

"Man?" Nichola inquired grimly.

Pelleas admitted it. I, now fancying myself wiser in the conceits of Nichola, ventured something else.

"I think, Nichola," I said, "that they — that he — that they — and I thought if you had some absolutely simple sandwiches —"

"Yah!" Nichola exclaimed. "So there's to be two pair o' you!"

Then something wonderful happened. Nichola slipped both hands beneath her floury apron and rolled up her arms in its calico length and put her head on one side and smiled — such a strange, crinkled smile interfering with all her worn features at once.

"My father had many goats," Nichola said without warning, "and one Summer I went with him to buy more, though that was before my bones were all

turned to cracked iron, you may be sure. And there was a young shepherd —"

At that magic moment a sharp snapping and crackling came from the kettle, and Nichola wheeled with a frown.

"So!" she cried angrily, "you come down here, letting my lard get too hot to go near to! Is it not that I am baking? And as for tea, it may be that there isn't any tea. Go away!"

"Pelleas," said I, as we climbed the stairs, "if it were not that Nichola is too old to work anywhere else —"

"I know it," Pelleas nodded frowning.

This is the dialogue in which we take part after each of Nichola's daily impertinences.

At four o'clock that afternoon I was roused from my drowsihead on hearing a little tap at my door. Lisa came in, her face flushed, her blue embroidered frock shimmering and ruffling to her feet.

"O Aunt Etarre," she begged, "put on your gray gown and your Mechlin fichu, will you? And come down right away — well, almost right away," she added naïvely.

"I will come presently," I assured her, as if I did not understand; and then the bell rang and Lisa, her eyes like stars, tapped down the stairs.

I was a long time about my dressing. The gray grosgrain silk is for very special occasions, and I had

not worn my Mechlin collar since Pelleas' birthday nearly a year ago. When I had them both on and my silver comb in my hair I heard Nichola's step outside my door. I bade her enter, but she merely stood for a moment on the threshold.

"Che!" she said grimly. "I hope, mem, you've got your neck well packed with flannel under that slimpsey stuff. One would say you dress lightly, lightly for fear of missing the rheumatism."

She had gone crookedly down the passage before I had opportunity to remention the tea. In a moment she came back, threw open my door and flung something on the bed.

"There," she said crossly, "put it on! No need to dress as if you was ninety."

And there on my pillow I saw as she hastened away the great pink tea rose that had blossomed only that day from the rose plant in her own window where she had tended it for months.

Pelleas was in the library across the hall from the drawing-room where those two dear little people were. I opened the library door softly and went in and stood close beside his chair before he turned. Pelleas is not in the least deaf, as we both know; he is simply no longer distracted by small, unnecessary noises.

He looked up smiling and then sprang to his feet and suddenly caught my hands and held me at arm's length and bade me turn about slowly, slowly so that

he might see. One would think that I had never worn my old grosgrain and my Mechlin. I told him so, though I can never conceal delight. And we talked a little about the first night that I had worn it — O, so many years before, and about many things in which the very sunshine of the room had no part because these things were so much more luminous.

At last when the clock struck five we crossed the hall to the drawing-room door. At the foot of the stairs Pelleas stopped for a moment.

"Do you remember, Etarre," he said, "the night that I 'spoke' to your father, and you waited in the drawing-room, half dead with alarm, as you made me believe?"

"Ah, yes," I cried, "and how my father used to say that you won his heart by your very beginning. 'I can't talk about it, sir,' you said, 'but you see, sir, you can; and will you?'"

We laughed together as we are never tired of laughing tenderly over that, and I remembered tenderly too the old blue and white drawing-room with the spindle-legged chairs and the stiff curtains where I had waited breathlessly that night in my flowered delaine dress, while Pelleas "spoke" to father. I was trembling when he came back, I recall, and he took me in his arms and kissed away my fear. And some way the thought of the girl in the flowered delaine dress who was I and of the eager, buoyant

young lad who was Pelleas must have shone in the faces of us both when we entered our drawing-room now, reverently, as if to meet our long-gone selves.

He was a fine, handsome fellow, — Eric Chartres, this young lover of Lisa's, and their sweet confusions and dignities were enchanting. Pelleas and I sat on the red sofa and beamed at them, and the little fire tossed and leaped on the hearth, and the shadows gathered in the corners and fell upon us; and on Lisa and her lover the firelight rested.

What a wonderful hour it was for our plain drawing-room, for so many years doomed to be merely the home of talk about war and rumours of war and relatives and their colourless doings and even about matches made for shadowy lovers whom it never might see. And now the room was called on to harbour Young Love itself. No wonder that the sober bindings on the shelves tried in the yellow firelight to give news from their own storied hearts that beat with the hearts of other lovers. No wonder that the flowers on the mantel looked perilously like a bridal wreath. At last, at last the poor room long deprived of its brightest uses was habited by Young Love.

Presently Pelleas startled me from my reverie.

"It's twenty past five," he murmured, "and no tea."

So Nichola intended to do as she pleased, and she was pleased to send no tea at all, and the rose was

but a sop to Cerbera. And I had so counted on seeing those young lovers in the delicate intimacy of their first tea. But even in that moment of my disappointment the stair door creaked and then I heard her coming up, one step at a time, so that I knew her to be laden with the tray.

Pelleas hastened to open the door for her and we were both fain to gasp with astonishment. For in Nichola came splendid in the newest and bluest of dresses with — wonder of all! — a white cap and apron to which only very stately occasions can persuade her. And when she had set the tray on the table I had much ado to keep from grasping her brown hands. For she had brought the guest-silver, my Royal Sèvres, my prettiest doilies and O, such thin, white, chicken sandwiches, such odorous tea and thick cream, and to crown all a silver dish of bonbons.

I tried to look my gratitude to her and I saw her standing by the fire tranquilly inspecting Lisa's young lover and pretty Lisa herself who was helping him to place my chair. And it may have been a trick of the firelight, but I fancied that I detected on Nichola's face that expression of the morning, as if her features were a little out of drawing, by way of bodying forth some unwonted thought. Then very slowly she rolled her arms in her crisp white apron as she had done in the morning and very slowly she began to speak.

"My father had many goats in Capri," she said again, "and one Summer I went with him to buy more. And at noon my father left me in the valley while he went to look at some hill flocks. As for me I sat by a tree to eat my lunch of goat's cheese and bread, and a young shepherd of those parts came and brought me berries and a little pat of sweet butter and we shared them. I did not see him again, but now I have made you a little pat of sweet butter," said Nichola, nodding.

We were all silent, and Pelleas and I were spell-bound; for it was as if this old, withered, silent woman had suddenly caught aside her robe and had looked into her own heart and given us news of its ancient beating. Old Nichola to have harboured such an hour of Arcady as this! And at that moment she turned to me with a kind of fury.

"For the love of heaven," she cried terribly, "why sit there stock-still till the crumpets are stone cold and the tea as red as the tail of a fox? Eat!"

She was out of the room like a whirlwind and clattering down the stairs. And for a moment we all looked silently in each other's faces and smiled a little — but tenderly, as if some unknown lover had lifted his head from his grave.

Thereafter we drank our tea very happily and Lisa's young lover, with his whole heart in his eager face, told us quite simply of his love for her and

begged us to help him. And we all well-nigh laughed and cried together at the bright business of life.

When the shadows had quite fallen and the young lover was gone and Lisa had slipped away to her room to be alone, Pelleas and I sat long before the fire. Nichola's rose, fading in my lace, gave out a fragrance to which some influence in the room was akin; and we both knew.

I said: "Pelleas, I have been remembering that morning long ago at Miss Deborah Ware's — and our Fountain of Gardens. When we were twenty-something, like Lisa and Eric."

"But so have I been thinking of that!" Pelleas cried. And we nodded, smiling, for we love to have that happen. Perhaps it makes us momentarily believe that we are each other, and no aid asked of science to bring it about. But now as I looked at him I momentarily believed something else as well.

"Pelleas," I began, "I am not sure — are you sure? Has any one else really been here in the room, besides us? Were Lisa and Eric really here — or have we only been remembering?"

Pelleas was looking in the fire and he did not meet my eyes.

"Lisa looks uncommonly like you, you know," he said.

"And that young Eric Chartres — O, indeed

Pelleas, he is not unlike you as you looked the very night that you 'spoke' to father. Dear," I said, "perhaps those two have not been here at all. *Perhaps it was we ourselves.*"

He looked at me swiftly; and "Pooh!" said he enigmatically; but Pelleas' doubt of charming things is always like belief.

I dare say many would feel that what we suspect is manifestly impossible. Besides, we have never actually admitted that we do suspect. But we are old and we have seen much magic.

VIII

A FOUNTAIN OF GARDENS

INDEED, to have remembered that morning at Miss Deborah Ware's was enough to bring back to us the very youth of which the morning was a part. It seems to Pelleas and me that most of the beautiful things that have come to us have been a part of our old age, as if in a kind of tender compensation. But that beautiful happening of our youth we love to remember, the more because it befell in the very week of our betrothal. And though our betrothal was more than fifty years ago, I suppose to be quite truthful that there is very little about those days that I do not recall; or if there be any forgotten moments I grieve to confess them. There are, however, I find to my amazement, many excellent people who conscientiously remember the dates of the Norman Conquest and the fall of Constantinople, and who are yet obliged to stop to think on what day their betrothal fell. As for me I would far rather offend my conscience in a matter of Turks than in a matter of love-knots.

On a delicate day in May, Eighteen Hundred and

Forty-five, Pelleas and I were quite other people. And I do protest that the lane where we were walking was different, too. I have never seen it since that summer; but I cannot believe that it now wears anything like the same fabric of shadow, the same curve of hedgerow or that season's pattern of flowers. The lane ran between the Low Grounds and the property of the Governor, on one side the thatched cots of the mill folk and the woodsmen, and on the other the Governor's great mansion, a treasure-house of rare canvas and curio. That morning the lane was a kind of causeway between two worlds, and there was no sterner boundary than a hedge of early wild roses. I remember how, stepping with Pelleas along that way of sun, I loved him for his young strength and his blue eyes and his splendid shoulders and for the way he looked down at me, but I think that he must have loved me chiefly for my gown of roses and for the roses in my hat. For I took very little account of life save its roses and I must believe that a sense of roses was my most lovable quality. We were I recall occupied chiefly in gathering roses from the hedgerow to fill my reticule.

"Now, suppose," Pelleas said, busy in a corner of green where the bloom was thickest, "suppose we were to find that the hedges go on and never stop, and that all there is to the world is this lane, and that we could walk here forever?"

I nodded. That was very like my conception of the world, and the speculation of Pelleas did not impress me as far wrong.

"Do you wish this morning could last forever, Etarre, do you?" asked Pelleas, looking down at me.

"Yes," said I truthfully, "I do." I hope that there is no one in the world who could not from his soul say that at least once of some hour of Spring and youth. In such a moment, it is my belief, the spirit is very near entering upon its own immortality — for I have always held that immortality must begin at some beautiful moment in this life. Though as for me, at that moment, I confess myself to have been thinking of nothing more immortal than the adorable way that Pelleas had of saying my name.

"But by and by," Pelleas went on, "I think we would come to a garden. Who ever heard of a love story without a garden? And it will be a 'different' garden from all the rest — the trees will be higher and the shadows will be made differently and instead of echoes there will be music. And there will be fountains — fountains everywhere; and when one has gone in the garden a fountain will spring up at the gate and no one can get out — ever. What do you think of that for a garden?" asked Pelleas.

"I think," said I, "that the garden we will come to will be Miss Deborah Ware's."

For in fact I was carrying a message to Miss Deborah Ware, a kinswoman of my mother's, and I had met Pelleas only by some heavenly chance as he crossed the common.

"And who is Miss Deborah Ware?" asked Pelleas, doubtfully, as if weighing the matter of entering her garden.

"She owns a gold thimble," I explained, "that once belonged to Marie Antoinette. She prefers wooden sabots to all other shoes. And she paints most beautiful pictures."

"Ah," said Pelleas, enlightened, "so *that* is who she is. And how does she look, pray?"

"I am certain that she looks like the Queen of Sheba," I told him. "And, moreover, all her caps are crown-shaped."

"*Now* I know how the Queen of Sheba looked," cried Pelleas, triumphantly. "She looked like the crowns of Miss Deborah's caps. Do you happen to know what the toll is to leave this lane?"

As I did not know — did anybody ever know? — and as we were even then at the end of the lane, my ignorance was rebuked and I paid the toll and I fancy repeated the lesson — it was a matter of honour to the sun and the wild roses not to let it be otherwise. And we crossed the West Meadow by the long way and at the last — at the very last, and nearly noon! — we reached the cottage where Miss Deborah Ware

had come to spend the Summer and engage in the unmaidenly pursuit of painting pictures.

To tell the truth our Summer community of good Knickerbocker folk were inclined to question Miss Deborah's good taste. Not that they objected to the paint, but the lack of virtue seemed to lie in the canvas. If Miss Deborah had painted candle-shades or china porringers or watered silk panels or flowerpots, no one, I think, would have murmured. But when they learned that she painted *pictures* they spread and lifted their fans.

"Miss Deborah Ware would ape the men," they said sternly. And when they saw her studio apron made of ticking and having a bib they tried to remonstrate with my mother, her kinswoman.

"She is a great beauty, for her age," said the women. "But Beauty is as Beauty does," they reminded her.

"Deborah does as Deborah is," my mother answered, smiling.

Miss Deborah was wearing the apron of ticking that morning that we went to see her — Pelleas and I, who were rather basely making her an excuse for the joy of our morning together. But Miss Deborah would have been the last to condemn that. She was in a room overlooking the valley, and a flood of north light poured on her easel and her idle palette. Miss Deborah was breakfasting; and she explained that

she had had a great fit for working very early; and she gave us some delicious tea and crumpets.

"This is the tea," she told us, "that Cupid and Psyche always drank. At least I suppose that is what the Japanese label says. Or perhaps it says Aucassin and Nicolette. . . . I am a bit back in my Japanese." And immediately Miss Deborah nodded at me a little and murmured that I crimsoned as prettily as either of these ladies.

Then: "They tell me that you two are betrothed," she said, leaning back in her chair. "Why is that?"

At that I blushed again and so I have no doubt did Pelleas, for we had not so much as said that word in each other's presence and to hear it pronounced aloud was the most heavenly torture.

"I suppose you are very much in love," she answered her question meditatively. "Well, I believe you. I believe you so thoroughly that I would like to paint you. What barbarism it is," she went on, "that they don't allow young lovers to have their portraits painted together while they are betrothed! Could there be a more delicious bit of history added to any portrait gallery? And what if the marriage never did come off — saving your presence? The history might be all the more delicious for the separation, and the canvas would be quite as valuable. I am at this moment painting two dear little peasant folk whose people flatter me by being delighted.

I think that I must really speak to your mother, child, about painting you," she said.

At that I stole a glance at Pelleas and surprised him at the same pastime. And in that moment I do not think that either the history or the taste of the portrait greatly occupied us; for neither of us could pass with serenity the idea of the sittings. Together, mornings, in that still, sun-flooded studio. What joy for those other lovers. In those days one had only to mention an impossibly romantic situation for Pelleas and me to live it out in imagination to its minutest joy.

"Of course she will not consent," Miss Deborah added philosophically, "so if I were you I would have another crumpet. My crumpets are considerably better than my portraits. And my cook does the crumpets."

She leaned forward in her low chair, and Pelleas and I looked at her in a kind of awe. She was like mother's Sweet-william that never would blossom in the seed-book colours but came out unexpectedly in the most amazing variegations. She sat with one long, slim hand propping her face, a face attenuated, whimsical in line, with full red mouth and eyes that never bothered with what went on before them so long as this did not obstruct their view.

"What do you think of that picture above your heads?" she asked.

We looked, glad to be set at our ease. Then Pelleas and I turned to each other in delicious trepidation. For there on the wall of Miss Deborah's studio was a picture of the very garden that we two had meant to find. We recognized it at once — our garden, where Pelleas had said the Spring lane would lead between the hedgerows and where the shadows would fall differently and the echoes be long drawn to music.

I cannot tell what there may have been about that picture so to move us, and to this day I do not know what place it strove to show. But, O, I remember the green of it, the tender, early green, the half-evident boughs of indeterminate bloom, the sense of freshness, of sweet surprise at some meaning of the year, the well, the shrine, the shepherd with his pipes, the incommunicable spirit of rhythm and of echo. . . .

"Do you like it?" asked Miss Deborah smiling, and I was abashed to find my eyes filled with tears.

"I think that this," Pelleas answered quaintly, "will be the soul of Spring, Miss Deborah; and the outdoors this morning will be the body."

"I dare say," said Miss Deborah, nodding; "though I fancy more things are souls than we give them credit for," she added.

Miss Deborah looked at us, her chin in her hand.

And after a moment to our great amazement she said: —

"I shall give you this picture for a wedding gift, I think. And I tell you now so that if you are tempted to break the engagement you will think twice. Is it a picture that you want to live with?"

It was not only a picture that we wanted to live with; it was a picture whose spell would be eternal. And "Did you paint it, Miss Deborah?" we asked in our simplicity.

Miss Deborah shook her head and named a great name, then just beginning to be reverenced.

"He paints pictures better than his cook makes crumpets," she said, "and the quality is not usual. Spend the day with me," she added abruptly. "I would like you to see the little lovers who are sitting for my 'Betrothed.' I will send a message to your mother, Etarre. Sit there while I work. I like to think of you there."

Whereupon she went off to her easel before the north light, and Pelleas and I sat in the quiet room with our Wonderful Picture and talked of it.

"There must be such a place," said Pelleas simply, "or he wouldn't have painted it. He *couldn't*, you know. There must be a place a little like it."

"Yes, a little like it," I assented, "with the fountain at the gate the way you said."

"Wouldn't it be wonderful to find it?" Pelleas

went on. "To come upon it quite suddenly when we didn't know. In Etruria, or Tuscany, or Tempe."

Yes, it would be wonderful and before all things wonderful.

"We would know it at once," he added. "We would have to know it, whatever way we came, by the well or by the path or by the shrine."

Yes, we agreed, we would have to know it. What wonder to step together over that green with the rhythm and echo of the pipes to lure us to the way. If once we found it we would never leave it, we settled that, too. For this was the week of our betrothal, and it did not occur to us that one must seek more than gardens. So we talked, and in the mists of our happy fancy Pelleas suddenly set a reality that made our hearts beat more joyously than for their dreams.

"Think, dear," he said, "this picture will hang in our home."

It would — it would. We looked at it with new eyes. In our home.

Eventually Miss Deborah Ware came back, one hand in the pocket of her ticking apron.

"You two make me think of that picture," she said. "That is why I have given it to you, I believe. It is such a kind of heaven-and-earth place, with the upper air to breathe, and what little ballast there is would be flowers and pipes of Pan. But *I* don't find fault

with that. Personally I believe that is the only air there is, and I'm certain it's the only proper ballast. You recognize the place in the picture, don't you?"

We looked at each other in some alarm at the idea of being told; but we ought to have trusted Miss Deborah.

"'A fountain of gardens,'" she quoted, "'a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices may flow out.' I don't know if that is what he meant," she added, "but that is what he painted. 'Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south,' is undoubtedly what that shepherd is piping. Come to luncheon. Perhaps we shall find goat's-milk cheese and Bibline wine and pure white honey. In case we do not, would steamed clams do?"

"Miss Deborah," said Pelleas, as we followed her down the studio, "we mean to go to that garden, the real garden, you know. We've been saying so now."

In the studio door she turned and faced us, nodding her understanding.

"Go there," she said. "But whether you ever go to the real garden or not, mind you live in this one. And one thing more: Mind you pay your entrance fee," she said.

At this, remembering as I do how our world was stuff of dreams, I think that we both must have looked a bit bewildered. *Entrance fee.* What had our fountain of gardens to do with an entrance fee?

"You don't know what that means?" she said. "I thought as much. Then I think I must ask you to promise me something."

She went across the hall to the dining-room, and we followed wondering.

"Just you keep the picture," said Miss Deborah Ware, "until it will make some one else happier than it makes you. And then give it away. Will you remember? Do you get the idea of the entrance fee to the garden? And you promise? It's just as I thought — we've steamed clams instead of ambrosia. Are you sorry you stopped?"

It was a very merry luncheon. I remember chiefly the epergne of clematis, and the border of the wall paper done in crocuses, and the sun flooding through leaded glass. Those were the days when an epergne of clematis and a border of crocuses and the like seemed to me to be inclusive of the law and the prophets, and I felt a luxury of pity for every one who had not this special grace of understanding. I think that I even felt a little stir of pity for Miss Deborah Ware. Yes, I decided, Miss Deborah was like mother's Sweet-william that would not blossom in the colours of the seed catalogue but showed forth

amazing hues of its own. Such as that entrance fee to Arcady.

We lingered at table until Miss Deborah's two models were announced — the two who were sitting for her "Betrothed."

"They are adorable little people," she said. "You must see them before you go. They make me think of ripe apples and robin redbreasts and mornings in the country. Even if it were not so I would like them for their shyness. The little maid — her name is Mitty Greaves — is in the prettiest panic every time I look at her; and Joel, the young lover, actually blushes when the clock strikes."

She went away to the studio and Pelleas and I looked at each other in sudden abashment to find ourselves together, taking our coffee alone. It might have been our own table in a land of clematis, beside our very fountain of gardens itself. Pelleas stretched his hand across the table for mine, and we lingered there in magnificent disregard of coffee until the sun slanted away and the sweet drowsiness of the afternoon was in the garden. Then we wandered back to the studio and sat in the window-seat opposite our Wonderful Picture and in murmurs disposed for all time, as we thought, of that extraordinary promise which Miss Deborah had demanded.

"This picture," Pelleas said solemnly, "never could make anybody so happy as it makes us. For

it *is* our garden that we planned in the lane this morning. . . . The picture will always bring back this morning to us, Etarre. It is our garden. It *couldn't* be the same to any one else."

"If we were to give it to any one, Pelleas," I recall saying, "it must be to some one who would understand what the garden means better than we."

"Yes," he assented; "some one who walks there all day long. Some one who 'walks in beauty' all the time."

Thereafter we fancied ourselves standing by the shrine and looking in the well, and we saw our dreams take shape in the nebulous fall of the fountain. Of our betrothal week it seems to me that that hour is sweetest to recall when I sat throned in the window-seat in my gown of roses, and Pelleas at my feet talked of our life to be. I think that there came to us from the wall the sound of the piping in our garden. Perhaps, although we had not then seen their faces, the mere presence of those other lovers was a part of our delight.

Presently Miss Deborah Ware pushed aside the curtain in the far end of the studio.

"Now they are going to rest for a little," she said, "and I must go down to the kitchen. But you may go about, anywhere you like."

It fell so silent in the studio that Pelleas and I fancied those other lovers to have gone out through

the glass doors into the garden. And when Pelleas proposed that we go to the north window and look away over the valley I think that we must have believed ourselves to be alone in the studio. At all events I recall that as we went up the room, lingering before a cast or a sketch or a bit of brass, Pelleas had slipped his arm about me; and his arm was still about me when we stood before the north window and he said: —

"Etarre — have you thought of something? Have you thought that some day we shall stand before the picture of our garden *when we are old?*"

This was a surprising reflection and we stood looking in each other's eyes trying to fathom the mystery which we have not fathomed yet, for even now we go wondering how it can be that we, who *were* we, are yet *not* we; and still the love, the love persists. I know of nothing more wonderful in the world than that.

But to youth this thought brings an inevitable question: —

"Will you love me then as much as you love me now?" I asked inevitably; and when Pelleas had answered with the unavoidable "More," I dare say that I promptly rebuked him with youth's "But could you love me more?" And I am certain that he must have answered with the usual divine logic of "No, sweetheart."

By which it will be seen that a May day in Eighteen Hundred and Forty-five was as modern as love itself.

Then for no reason at all we looked toward the west window; and there in the embrasure across the width of the great room were standing Mitty Greaves and Joel, Miss Deborah's little lover-models, and both Mitty's hands were crushed in Joel's hands and he was looking into her lifted eyes as if he were settling for all time some such question as had just been gladdening us.

They did not see us. And as swiftly as if we had been the guilty ones, as indeed we were, we stole back to the other end of the studio, breathless with our secret. We felt such fellowship with all the world and particularly the world of lovers that so to have surprised them was, in a manner, a kind of delicious justification of ourselves. It was like having met ourselves in another world where the heavenly principle which we already knew maintained with a heavenly persistence.

"I dare say," murmured Pelleas joyously, "I dare say that they think they love each other as much as we do."

We were sitting in the window-seat, a little awed by our sudden sense of being sharers in such a universal secret, when Miss Deborah came back and forthwith summoned us all before the open fire. She

had brought a great plate of home-made candy, thick with nuts.

"Mitty and Joel," she said leisurely, "shall I tell you a secret? You are not the only ones who are in love. For these two friends here are like to be married before you are."

Dear little Mitty in her starched white muslin frock — I can see her now, how she blushed and lifted her shy eyes. Mitty was the daughter of a laundress in the Low Grounds and I remember the scrupulous purity of her white, threadbare gown. Miss Deborah had told us that her very hair looked ironed and that it had long been her opinion that her mother starched her flaxen braids. And Joel, in his open-throated blue blouse, could no more have kept the adoration from his eyes when he looked at Mitty than he could have kept his shifting brown hands quiet on his knees. They belonged to the little wild-bird people, a variety that I have since come to love and to seek out.

"And why," Pelleas asked then, "are we likely to be married first? For I'm afraid we have a whole year to wait."

I recall that Miss Deborah tried to turn aside that question by asking us quickly how we had been amusing ourselves; and when Pelleas told her that we had been sitting before our Wonderful Picture she talked

about the picture almost as if she wished to keep us silent.

"Up at the Governor's house," said Miss Deborah, "they have wanted for years to buy it. The Governor saw it when I had it in town. But the picture is yours now, for all that. Don't you think that is a pretty picture, Mitty?" she asked.

At this little Mitty looked up, proud and pleased to be appealed to, and turned shyly to our Wonderful Picture — the picture that gave Pelleas and me a new sense of happiness whenever we looked at it; and she said with an hesitation that was like another grace: —

"Yes'm. It's the loveliest green, all over it. It's the colour of the moss on the roof of our woodshed."

Ah, poor little Mitty, I remember thinking almost passionately. Why was it that she was shut out from the kind of joy that came to Pelleas and me in our picture? It was as if their love were indeed of another world, in another sense than we had thought. For this picture that had opened a kind of paradise to us was to these other lovers merely suggestive of Mitty's woodshed roof down in the Low Grounds.

"Shall you be married by the autumn?" Pelleas asked of them then somewhat hurriedly.

And at that Miss Deborah fell silent as if she had done her best to make us understand; and Mitty answered him.

"Oh, no, sir," she said hesitatingly. "You see, it's Joel's father — he's hurt in the woods — a tree fell on him — he can't ever work no more, they think. And so Joel's got the family for a while."

"Joel's got the family for a while." We knew what that meant, even before Pelleas' sympathetic questioning brought out the fact that six were dependent on him, boy that he was, with his own right to toil. He talked bravely, even buoyantly, of his prospects on his pittance at the mill. And little Mitty listened and looked up at him adoringly and faced with perfect courage the prospect of those years of loneliness and waiting. As I heard them talk and as their plans unfolded shyly in the warmth of our eager interest, I think there came to me for the first time the sad wondering that must come upon us all: How should it be that Pelleas and I had so much and they so little? how should it be that to us there were the Spring lanes, the May roses, the fountain of gardens — and to them the burden of the day?

To us the fountain of gardens. The thought was as poignant as a summons. Ay, to us the joy of the garden, the possession of its beauty; and why then, since we possessed its spirit, should the mere magic of the canvas be ours? We could part with that and by no means lose our garden, for the garden would be ours always. But the value that the world would set upon the picture itself, the value that they would

set upon it at the Governor's house where were walls of rare canvas and curio — was this what Miss Deborah had meant, I wondered? Here on the day that we had received it were there come two to whom Miss Deborah's gift would give greater happiness than to us?

I looked at Pelleas and I think that in that moment was worked our first miracle of understanding, and to this day we do not know to whom the wish came first. But Pelleas smiled and I nodded a little and he knew and he turned to Miss Deborah; and I leaned toward Mitty and spoke most incoherently I fear, to keep her attention from what Miss Deborah should say. But for all that I heard perfectly: —

"Would it be enough?" Miss Deborah repeated. "Dear boy, the picture would keep the whole family like kings for a year. Since you ask me, you know."

And Pelleas turned to me with a barely perceptible —

"Shall we, Etarre?"

And I made him know that it was what I would have above all other things, if Miss Deborah was willing. And as for Miss Deborah, she leaned back in her low chair, her eyes shining and a little pink spot on either cheek, and she said only: —

"I told you! I tell everybody! It's you heaven-and-earth kind of people with a ballast of flowers

that know more about your entrance fee to the garden than anybody else."

We wondered afterward what she could have meant; for of course there could be no question of our having paid an entrance fee to our garden in the sense that she had intended, since what we were proposing to do was to us no payment of a debt or a fee, but instead a great happiness to us both.

"Are you sure, Miss Deborah, that they want it for the Governor's house *now?*" Pelleas asked in sudden anxiety.

"They were here again yesterday to ask me," Miss Deborah assured us; and I think there was a certain radiance in her face.

So Miss Deborah told Mitty and Joel—dear little maid, dear honest young lover; shall I ever forget the look in their eyes when they knew? And, remembering, I am smitten with a kind of wonderment at the immortality of the look of happiness in another's eyes. For many and many a time when Pelleas and I have been stepping through some way of shadow we have, I know, recalled the look on those luminous young faces; and we have said to each other that life can never be wholly shadowed or wholly barren while there remain in the world wistful faces to whom one may bring that look. It is so easy to make eyes brighten, as I hope every one in the world knows.

And so our fountain of gardens tossed up such a rainbow as the happiness of Mitty and Joel — Mitty with the starched flaxen braids and Joel with the brown shining face to whom the picture had suggested only the green of a woodshed roof. Pelleas and I had quite forgotten that we had meant to give the picture to some one who should understand the garden better than we — one who should "walk in beauty." Something of the significance of this stirred vaguely in our thought even then; but I think that we have since come to regard this change of purpose as holding one of the meanings of life.

Mitty and Joel left Miss Deborah's house just before us, and Pelleas and I lingered for a moment in her doorway.

"That young artist," said Miss Deborah, "who paints pictures better than his cook makes crumpets — I shall write to him to-night. I shall tell him that even if he never paints another picture he will not have been an artist in vain." She leaned toward us, smiling and nodding a little. "There will be other entrance fees," she said; "watch for them."

We went up the twilight lane that led between the Governor's treasure-house of canvas and curio and the thatched cots of the Low Grounds. Save for the shadowy figures of Mitty and Joel walking before us, and waving their hands at the lane's turning, nothing was changed since the morning. Yet now the

spirit of the place lived not only in its spell of bloom but it lived also in us. Some door had been opened and we had entered.

When we reached the upper meadow, Pelleas suddenly caught my hand.

"Ah, look — look, Etarre!" he cried.

In the dimness the meadow lay, all of tender, early green, like that of our Wonderful Picture, with half-evident boughs of indeterminate bloom pleasant with freshness and with sweet surprise at some meaning of the year.

"Pelleas," I said, "I think, if we look, the well and the shepherd with his pipes will be over there."

"And the shrine," Pelleas said.

We stood at the stile, and it seemed to us that the dusk had shaped itself to be our garden at whose gate, when one has entered, a fountain will spring so that, as Pelleas had said, "no one can get out — ever." At the last we looked long in each other's eyes. And I think that we read there the secret of the garden that lies not in Etruria, or Tuscany, or Tempe; and we knew its living waters and its spices and its incommunicable spirit of rhythm and of echo.

IX

THE BABY

Our grandniece, Enid, is older than Lisa, her sister. Indeed, Enid was twenty-two that Spring, and had been for two years happily married in spite of the fact that Pelleas and I had had no hand in the wooing. To see Enid with her baby in her arms was considerably like watching a wild rose rock a butterfly, and no one can fancy how tenderly we two observed her. I think that few sweet surprises of experience or even of wisdom have so confirmed our joy in life as the sight of our grandniece Enid with her baby.

It chanced that when the baby was but a few weeks old David, Enid's young husband, was sent to The Hague upon some government business, a state of affairs for which it seemed to Pelleas and me that the United States should be called to account. For experience shows that the government will go irresistibly forward but I protest that the baby's father never can be compensated for that absence; and I would like to have any one object who can believe differently.

For all his impatience to see whether the little child had grown to manhood in those six weeks or so, David was obliged to report at Washington immediately upon his return. When the steamship was almost due Enid found that she could wait for him to see the baby not one day longer than that on which the boat was to arrive. So she took train from somewhere in Connecticut with that very little child and arrived at our house in a sad state of collapse, a few minutes before her telegram. Enid has no nurse maid. They are very young married people indeed.

The night on which Enid and her baby reached us Pelleas and I had been sitting in the dark of our drawing-room, with the fire almost burned out. It was one of the nights when all the little shadows that live near come creeping forth. They came when we were not aware and there they were in the room, saying nothing. The ghosts that come to the platforms of Elsinore do not often speak.

"We dreamed it differently, Etarre," Pelleas had said.

I knew what he meant. Have we not all dreamed it differently? And then we sat thinking of the Great Dream which we had had and lost. For there was a time, when Pelleas could model and I could write so that a few were deceived, that the Great Dream for one radiant year was in our home

and went away when little Cedric died. In all the years since then we have gone wondering where he may be now, and where now, without us. For he was so very tiny when he left us; he could hardly take a step alone even by clinging to my finger, with Pelleas' hands outstretched before him. I think it is partly lest he be needing us as he needed us then that we are never very far from him in thought, and that night we talked long of him until one by one all the other shadows went away in the presence of his little figure on our hearth.

So we were sitting with "Do you remember?" and "But do you remember?" on our lips when the door-bell rang and Nichola came upstairs to answer it, talking all the way. We wondered somewhat, for we have no unexpected visitors and no small excitements. We wondered the more when she appeared on the threshold of the drawing-room, bearing in her arms a white bundle which wore long and alarmingly fluffy skirts.

"Nichola!" we both cried; for you do not know how pleasant it is when the days grow colourless to have something happen which you yourself did not bring about. "Nichola! What is it?"

"It's a babby," Nichola informed us grimly, and laid it in Pelleas' arms — face downward, he afterward told me. Then she beckoned me to the hall and I went, barely able to stand; for I was certain that it

had been left in a basket on the steps with nothing but a locket.

"Nichola," I begged, "whose baby?"

Nichola was bending over the bench where sat poor little Enid, crying helplessly.

"N — nobody told me," Enid sobbed on my shoulder, "what it would be like to travel with a ten-weeks-old baby. He cried every m — mile of the way here — and he is a good baby, too!"

Bless the little mothers. I have never yet known one who would not assure you, though in the presence of a child exhibiting a most dreadful temper, that her baby was "usually so good, too."

Together, though I suppose that I hindered far more than I helped, Nichola and I got Enid upstairs and put her in bed, dear little thing, hardly more than a baby herself for all her wise use of the most advanced baby terms. Nichola hurried downstairs and in a few minutes bustled back with a steaming bowl of some mysterious compound, hot and savoury in a bowl. How do some people always know what to bring you, hot and savoury, in a bowl? If I had gone down to the kitchen I protest that I could have devised nothing but eggs.

Nichola insisted on feeding Enid — the impertinent old woman had observed that when I am excited my hands tremble. But whose do not? As for Nichola I had often told her that she would not show

emotion if an army with banners were to march in the front door. Instead of fear or sorrow or agitation Nichola's way of emotion is anger; and I should have expected her to remind such an army of the purpose of the door mat.

"You'd best," Nichola said to me over her shoulder, "go downstairs and see after that — babby."

Nichola dislikes a great many things, but the greatest of these dislikes is babies. When she passes one in its perambulator I have seen her take the extreme edge of the walk.

"They ain't a bone in 'em," she once explained; "when you go to pick 'em up, they *slimpse*."

I deplored this failing of Nichola's as I hurried downstairs to Pelleas, but I was chiefly concerned to know how he had got on in my absence — Pelleas, who will not even hold my Angora.

No sound came from the drawing-room. I entered fearfully, for even a man of genius is sometimes helpless. I have never known my own alarm more swiftly rebuked.

He had managed to turn on the lights and furthermore he had contrived to take off the baby's cloak and bonnet and veil, though usually he could as easily embroider a thing as to untie it, save after a very long time. And there sat Pelleas on the sofa with the baby in one arm, and he was gravely holding a lighted match a foot from its face.

As I looked he threw the burned match in the grate, soberly lighted another and repeated the performance. Evidently he construed some movement of the baby's face to be an answering smile, for he looked vastly pleased and encouraged and instantly said clearly: —

"Well, tol, tol, tol, tolly tol! Yes!" And then added in a tone of the simplest conviction, "Of course."

I hurried forward, laughing at him in spite of the sudden lump in my throat. It is sad for Pelleas to be nobody's grandfather when he looks so precisely like a grandfather on the stage.

"What are the matches for, Pelleas?" I cried.

He looked up with the adorably abashed expression that I love to bring to his eyes.

"They keep its attention," he murmured apologetically, "nothing else would. I think it's hungry."

"'It'!" I cried scornfully; "why, it's a boy."

"Ah, well now," Pelleas argued placidly, "you said 'It's a boy.' And I said, 'It's hungry.' What's the difference?"

And to this there was really no response.

The baby's disturbed babbling waxed to a steady fretting which increased in volume and violence. Hungry he undoubtedly was.

I remembered that Enid's black bag lay on the bench in the hall. I hurried to it, and there was the baby's empty bottle. When I came back, though

Pelleas was lighting matches at a furious rate, the baby was crying at the top of his small strength.

"He'll disturb Enid," I said. "Pelleas," I added, as one proposing revolutions, "we must take the baby down to the kitchen and feed him."

You to whom such sweet offices are the joy — or the burden! — of every day, what can you know of the thrill of that moment to one whose arms have been empty for so long? I protest that holding the keys to The Hague and all Europe and the other continents is not to be compared to the radiant responsibility of that moment.

Pelleas promptly stood up and extended his arms.

"Take it," he said, with enchanting masculine helplessness. Pelleas will not even let me carry my primroses up and down stairs, but merely because this was a baby he resigned his rights. I had almost forgotten how humble men are in such a presence.

I took the baby in my arms, and he settled down with that contented little gurgle which always attends a baby's changing hands, most subtilely flattering the new nurse until the storm breaks afresh harder than before. This the storm did next, and I looked at Pelleas a little wildly. For whatever was to be done I must do.

"Go first," said I firmly, "and open the kitchen door."

I followed him down the stairs, one foot at a time,

and when he opened the door the sight warmed my heart. The kitchen was cheery and brightly lighted, a hot fire was blazing in the range, and the teakettle was singing away to make the most miserable at peace. Sometime I shall write a letter to those who are of all men the bluest, and the substance of it will be: Go and put on the teakettle.

I sat by the fire while Pelleas, by devious ways of pantry and refrigerator, sought out the milk, and we were very merry over warming it, for it was a wonderful occasion. Pelleas spilled a great deal of milk on Nichola's perfectly polished griddles — O, I could not have loved him if in such a pleasant experience his hands had been perfectly firm and indifferent. Nichola's hands would have been quite firm. That brown old woman has no tremors and no tears. And just as Pelleas had filled the baby's bottle, she appeared at the stair door.

"The babby's mother," she said, folding her arms, "says you'd know about mixin' in the lime water an' the milk sugar, an' boilin' the bottles up, an' washin' out the babby's mouth with carbolic acid."

"Nichola!" we gasped.

"That's what she says," Nichola maintained firmly, "some kind o' acid. I think she says her Aunt Septy told her. She says I's to tell you or the babby'd starve. The young leddy acts like a cluck-chicken."

When she had gone back upstairs Pelleas and I looked in each other's faces.

"I had forgotten," I said weakly, "Pelleas, they boil *everything* now."

"They do?" said Pelleas helplessly.

"And they use two *separate* bottles," I recalled anxiously. "And they —"

Pelleas wrinkled his eyes at the corners.

"Fudge!" he said.

O, I loved Pelleas for that "Fudge!" Not that I do not believe in every improvement in the world. I do. And Pelleas holds the most advanced doctrines. But now and then I do love a "Fudge!"

"Would you dare give him this warm milk?" I asked him bravely.

"I certainly would dare," Pelleas answered clearly; "we would take the baby to ride in an automobile, would we not? and as for danger —"

"But, Pelleas," I hesitated, "I don't like to think we're behind the times, undermining the progress of Society and Science and —"

By then the displeasure of the baby was like that of a young god, neglected of Hebe. Pelleas handed me the bottle.

"I am the last not to sympathize with these details," he said gravely, "but it's hungry, Etarre. Feed it. The situation seems to require something more than a boiled bottle."

So, being unregenerate, we hesitated no longer. And Pelleas sat beside me, and the baby drank with little soft, shuddering breaths at the painful memory of how hungry he really had been. I bent above him and so did Pelleas, our heads quite close together as we watched him, and heard the little soft noises and sighs and met the eyes' grave, wondering criticism. So long, so long it had been since I had seen that one serious eye lifted to mine as a little face lay against my breast.

Pelleas put out one finger and the funny little hand caught it and clung to it. Pelleas wrinkled his eyes at the corners and smiled up at me — I had almost forgotten how he used to do that and then wait for me to tell him that at that rate I could never get Cedric to sleep. When Pelleas did that now we sat silent; for very little babies are never unlike, and if I had really let myself I might have imagined and so I think might Pelleas have imagined . . . that which for more than forty years we have only dreamed.

At last the baby moved his head, gurgled a brief grace, stared up at us unwinkingly, and then wrinkled his face astoundingly. Pelleas rose and looked wildly about for matches. One would have said that we were fugitives from justice crouching behind a panel and that our safety depended upon keeping that baby quiet during the passing of the men-at-

arms. I cannot tell how it is with others, but when one is seventy a baby affects one like this and to prevent it crying seems all the law and a fair proportion of the prophets. So that when Pelleas came with a box of paraffin matches and lighted whole handfuls before Enid's baby's eyes I said very little; for he did stop crying, though he looked at these humble pyrotechnics somewhat haughtily and as if he knew more about them than he cared to give out.

The stair door does not creak, and this time Nichola was quite in the kitchen before we heard her. She looked at us once and then hurried to the other side of the room and busied herself at the dresser. We have seldom seen Nichola laugh but, if it were not that we cannot imagine her laughing, I would have thought and Pelleas would have thought that her voice sounded ever so slightly muffled.

"Its mother wants it right straight off," she remarked, with her back toward us.

We rose promptly, and meekly made our way upstairs. Old Nichola dictates to us all day long in matters in which, as I think, we are really far wiser than she; how then should we not yield in crises of which we may be supposed to know nothing? Though I am bound to confess that save in matters of boiling I felt myself as wise as little Enid who, as I have said, is a baby herself. And this suggests something about which I have often wondered, namely,

when the actual noon of motherhood may be? For I protest it seems to me that all the mothers of my acquaintance are either themselves babies, or else I catch myself thinking that they are too old and even spinsterish in their notions to be able perfectly to bring up a child. Yet it cannot very well be that I was the only mother neither too young nor too old to train youth properly.

I laid the little thing in Enid's bed, and Enid smiled — that tender, pitiful, young-mother smile which somehow breaks one's heart no matter how happy the young mother may be. But I was certain that the baby would disturb her. And an hour later while the doctor was with her an idea came to me that set me in a delicious flutter. I had forgotten that there are such sweet excitements in the world I hugged the hope in silence for a moment and then shared it with Pelleas.

"Suppose," I said, "that Enid should need her rest to-night?"

I looked at him tentatively, expecting him to understand at once as he almost never fails to do. I did not remember that it is far easier to understand in matters of design, rhythm and the like, which had occupied us these many years, than to adjust one's self without preparation to the luminous suggestion which I was harbouring.

"I hope that she *will* have a good night," Pelleas advanced, with appalling density.

"But suppose," I persisted, "that she should need her rest and that the doctor thought the baby would be certain to disturb her?"

"If it cries," Pelleas suggested then with magnificent generosity, "you might get it and rock it awhile."

"Pelleas!" I cried, "don't you see? Maybe we can have the baby with us all night."

Pelleas looked up in surprise; then his dear face shone.

"Could we, do you think?" he said, as we say when we want a thing very much.

"We will," I promised.

Therefore when we heard the doctor coming downstairs we hurried to the hall and waited for him at the foot of the stairs. Between us we must have laid the matter before him, though I do not in the least remember what we may have said; but some way we made him know for he nodded and smiled in a surprising fashion.

"Yes," said he, "yes — by all means! I really am persuaded that it would be an act of charity for you to keep that baby with you to-night."

"On our niece's account, you know," said I with dignity.

"Certainly," said he gravely, and caught up his hat and rushed away. At the time it seemed to me

that he was curiously moved about something and I feared that Enid might be very ill.

As for Pelleas and me we could hardly wait to go upstairs. Of course Nichola had to know; she brought up the milk and the alcohol lamp and we were obliged to tell her. To tell Nichola that you mean to do anything which she considers foolish is very like a confession that your whole point of view is ignorant and diseased. Still, in some fashion, Pelleas and I together told her. Our old servant regarded us with the disapprobation which it is her delight not to disguise. Then on her brown fingers she checked matters off.

"No sleep for neither one of you," she cast up the account. "Headaches to-morrow all day. Death o' cold dancin' in an' out o' bed. An' a smothered babby by mornin'."

"O, no, no, Nichola," said we, gently but sweepingly.

I brought the baby in our room to undress him. Our room was cheerful and warm. An open fire was burning; and Pelleas had lighted all the candles as we will do on the rare occasions when we are dressing for some great event. On a table beside the bed stood the alcohol lamp and the glasses and the baby's bottle — I had not even mentioned lime water and boiled bottles to Enid — and strange enough they looked where only my Bible and my

medicine have lived for so long. The baby was asleep when we took him from Enid, but he waked and smiled impartially and caught at the air in perfect peace. I took off the little garments, feeling all the old skill come back to my hands idle to all such sweet business for more than forty years. Pelleas insisted on drawing off the tiny socks and stockings and when I saw the little feet in his palm I could almost have believed, for one swift moment, that the years had indeed rolled back. Then we wrapped him warmly and laid him in the great bed. And Pelleas spent a long while happily tucking in and tucking down and pretending to be very useful.

We had thought to read for a little while as is our wont and we did try to do so; but neither of us could keep our eyes anywhere near the book or could listen to the other read aloud. For the unwonted sound of that soft breathing was wholly distracting. And once a little hand was thrown up over the edge of the covers. What did we care about the sculptures at Ægina then?

Nichola looked in.

"Best leave a lamp burnin'," she said crossly. "An' if it should cry, you call me."

By which, as Pelleas said afterward, she by no means intended to provide for the possible emotion of the lamp.

I was longing to feel that little head in the hollow

of my arm. I laid it there presently and tucked my hand between the two pillows as I had been wont and held away the covering from the baby's face. There was the fine dark hair, and there was the tiny hand uplifted and — as I live! — there was the identical ruffle of lace which had always used to bother about the little chin. In that first ecstatic moment I looked up at Pelleas almost frightened, half-expecting the buoyant, youthful face and the dear eyes that were wont to look down upon Cedric and me. And the dear eyes smiled, for they have never changed.

I lay very still listening to that quiet breathing, to the rustle and turning which is a tender language of its own. When one is seventy and closes one's eyes it is wonderful how the whole world grows youthful. And when I had almost dozed that tender rustling brought me back so happily that I could hardly tell which was memory of that other little head upon my arm and which was now. At midnight and twice later when the baby's food had to be warmed it was I who did this, and the old familiar helplessness of Pelleas in this little presence delighted me beyond measure. Though when the baby grew impatient and cried, Pelleas valiantly lighted matches before him, and he fell silent and even smiled, and slept again. I record it as a mere matter of history that in the intervals of these

ceremonies I had not slept for a moment. For there had come thronging back such a company of memories, such a very flight of spirits of the old delight of our wonderful year when there was Cedric, that the world had no room for sleep at all. Sleep! I do not suppose that any one would chide me for being wakeful at a ball? And nothing in the world could have been so delightful to me as were those hours when that little head lay on my arm.

Sometime after daylight he awoke. Cedric had been wont to lie quietly as long as ever I would do so, but Enid's baby — for it was Enid's baby for all our pretending — awoke and played with his fists. Then a fancy that had hovered over me all the night took shape, and I told it to Pelleas.

"Dear," I said, "you know the things in the bottom drawer in the closet?"

"Yes," he answered at once, "I have been thinking about them."

"Suppose," I suggested, "that we were to — to try some of them on the baby."

"I have been thinking the same thing," Pelleas said.

It was not cold in the room, for we had kept the hearth alive all the night. When we were warmly wrapped and had drawn chairs before the fire, Pelleas brought from the closet that box filled with

the tender yellow muslins that Cedric had worn such a little time. I chose the white batiste gown that I had made myself, every stitch; and over his little nightgown we put it on Enid's baby. He was very good, and crowed and nestled; and so we found the long white cloak that I had embroidered and a bonnet that Pelleas had once selected himself, all alone, at a shop. And Enid's baby's arm doubled up in a ball when I tried to put it in a sleeve — I suppose that there never was a baby's arm that did not do this, but I have known only one little arm. And when the pink hand came creeping through the cuff Pelleas caught it and kissed it — O, I had not thought for years how he used to do that.

"Now!" I said, "Pelleas — look now."

Enid's baby sat on my knee, his back to us both. The little bent back in that white coat, the soft collar crumpling up about the neck in spite of me, the same little bonnet with the flower in the back and the lace all around —

Pelleas and I looked at each other silently. And not so much in grief as in longing that was like the hope of heaven.

We did not hear Nichola coming with our coffee. So she opened the door and saw the box on the floor and the things scattered all about. She knew what they were. She was with us when little Cedric was

here, and she had not forgotten. She stood still, and then set the tray down on the table.

"Drink your coffee!" she called sharply, and was out of the room before we could speak.

In a moment, when I could, and because Enid's baby cried then I laid him in Pelleas' arms and went out to tell Nichola to bring more milk.

And leaning against a bureau in the passage Nichola stood crying as if her heart would break.

"Go on away!" she said, shaking her old gray head. "Go on away!"

X

THE MARRIAGE OF KATINKA

"I SHALL take my white lady's-cloth gown," I repeated obstinately.

"You don't need it no more than what you do two heads, mem," Nichola maintained.

"But it is the first visit that I've made in three years, Nichola," I argued, "and it is quite the prettiest gown that I've had for —"

"Yah!" Nichola denied; "you've got four sides of a closet hung full. An' where you goin' but down on a farm for three days? Take the kitchen stove if you must, but leave the dress here. You'll be laughed at for fashionable!"

I wavered, and looked consultingly at Pelleas.

It is one sign of our advancing years, we must believe, that Pelleas and I dislike to be laughed at. Our old servant scolds us all day long and we are philosophical; but if she laughs at either of us Pelleas grieves and I rage. Nichola's "You'll be laughed at for fashionable" humbled me.

Pelleas, the morning sun shining on his hair, was

picking dead leaves from the begonias in the window and pretended not to hear.

I looked longingly at my white lady's-cloth gown but Nichola was already folding it away. It had ruffles of lace and a chiffon fichu and was altogether most magnificent. I had had it made for a winter wedding and as it had not been worn since, I was openly anxious to reappear in it. And now on occasion of this visit to Cousin Diantha at Paddington Nichola threatened me with remorse if I so much as took it with me. I would be "laughed at for fashionable!"

However, Pelleas continuing to pick dead leaves in a cowardly fashion, there would have been no help for me had not Nichola at that moment been called from the room by the poultry wagon which drew up at our door like a god from a cloud. Our steamer-trunk, carefully packed, stood open before me with room enough and to spare for my white lady's-cloth gown.

"Pelleas!" I cried impulsively.

He looked round inquiringly, pretending to have been until that moment vastly absorbed.

"If I put the gown in," I cried excitedly, "will you strap the trunk before she gets back?"

Pelleas wrinkled his eyes at the corners, and it was the look that means whatever I mean.

In a twinkling the gown was out of its tissues and

tumbled in place in a fashion which would have scandalized me if I had been feeling less adventuresome. Pelleas, whose hands could have trembled with no more sympathy if he had been expecting to appear in the gown too, fastened the straps and turned the key and we hurried downstairs. On the landing we met Nichola.

"The trunk is strapped, Nichola," said I firmly.

"You needn't to hev done that," she grunted graciously.

We passed her in guilty silence.

"If only there is actually a chance to wear the gown," I confided to Pelleas on the train that afternoon, "it will make it all right to have taken it."

"What a shocking principle, Etarre," returned Pelleas, quite as if he had not helped.

We were met at the Paddington station by something which Cousin Diantha called "the rig." It was four-seated and had flying canvas sides which seemed to billow it on its way. From an opening in the canvas Cousin Diantha herself thrust out a red mitten as the bony driver was conducting us across the platform. Our Cousin Diantha Bethune is the mince-pie-and-plum-pudding branch of our family. We can never think of her without recollecting her pantry and her oven. And whereas some women wear always the air of having just dressed several children or written letters or

been shopping, Cousin Diantha seems to have been caught red-handed at slicing and kneading and to be away from those processes under protest. She never reads a book without seeming to turn the leaves with a cook knife and I think her gowns must all be made with "apron fronts."

"Ain't this old times though?" she cried, opening her arms to me, "ain't it? Etarre, you set here by me. Pelleas can set front with Hiram there. My!"

"The rig" rocked up the dingy village street with us, its only passengers, buttoned securely within its canvas sails so that I could see Paddington before us like an aureole about the head of Pelleas. But if a grate fire had been a-light in that shabby interior it could have cheered us no more than did Cousin Diantha's ruddy face and scarlet mittens. She gave us news of the farm that teemed with her offices of spicing and frosting; and by the time we reached her door we were already thinking in terms of viands and ingredients.

"What a nice little, white little room," said Pelleas for example, immediately we had set our lamp on our bureau. "The ceiling looks like a lemon pie." Verily are there not kitchen-cupboard houses whose carpets resemble fruit jelly and whose bookcases suggest different kinds of dessert?

Cousin Diantha was bustling down the stairs. She never walked as others do but she seemed to be

always hurrying for fear, say, that the toast was burning.

"Baked potatoes!" she called back cheerily. "I put 'em in last thing before I left, an' Katinka says they're done. Supper's ready when you are."

I was hanging my white lady's-cloth gown under the cretonne curtain.

"Katinka," I repeated to Pelleas in a kind of absent-minded pleasure.

"It sounds like throwing down a handful of spoons," submitted Pelleas, wrinkling the corners of his eyes.

We saw Katinka first when we were all about the table — Cousin Diantha, Miss Waitie who was her spinster sister, Pelleas and I, and Andy, who worked for his board. I shall not soon forget the picture that she made as she passed the corn cakes,— Katinka, little maid-of-all-work, in a patched black frock and a red rubber ring and a red rubber bracelet. Her face was round and polished and rosy with health, and she was always breathless and clothed with a pretty fear that she was doing everything wrong. Moreover, she had her ideas about serving — she afterward told me that she had worked for a week at the minister's in Paddington where every one at breakfast, she added in an awed voice, "had a finger bowl to themself." Cousin Diantha, good soul, cared very little how her dainties were served so that the

table was kept groaning, and Katinka had therefore undertaken a series of reforms to impress which she moved in a mysterious way. For example, as she handed the corn cakes and just as I raised my hand to take one, steaming, moist, yellow and quite beneath my touch, the plate was suddenly sharply withdrawn, a spirited revolution of Katinka's hands ensued, and the cakes reappeared upon my other side.

"We got the table set longways o' the room tonight," she explained frankly, "and I can't hardly tell which *is* left till I look at my ring."

Conversation with Katinka while she served was, I perceived, a habit of the house; and indeed Katinka's accounts of kitchen happenings were only second in charm to Katinka's comments upon the table talk. It was to this informality that I was indebted for chancing on a radiant mystery on that very night of our arrival.

"Mis' Grocer Helman," said Cousin Diantha to me at this first supper — every woman in Paddington has her husband's occupation for a surname — "wants to come to see you about making over her silk. She's heard you was from the city an' she says Mis' Photographer Bronson's used up the only way she — Mis' Grocer — knew on a cheap taffeta. Mis' Grocer Helman won't copy. She's got a sinful pride."

Katinka set down the bread plate.

"I got some loaf sugar sent up from Helman's to-day," she contributed, "because I just *had* to get that new delivery wagon up here to this house somehow. It'd been in front o' Mis' Lawyer More's twict in one forenoon."

And at this Miss Waitie, who was always a little hoarse and very playful, shook her head at Katinka.

"Now, new delivery wagon nothin'," she said skeptically; "it's that curly-headed delivery boy, *I'll* be bound."

So it was in my very first hour in Cousin Diantha's house that I saw what those two good souls had never suspected. For at Miss Waitie's words Andy, who worked for his board, suddenly flushed one agonizing red and spilled the preserves on the tablecloth. What more did any sane woman need on which to base the whole pleasant matter? Andy was in love with Katinka.

I sat up very straight and refused the fish balls in my preoccupation. My entire visit to Paddington quickly resolved itself into one momentous inquiry: Was Katinka in love with Andy?

"Is Katinka in love with Andy?" I put it to Pelleas excitedly, when at last we were upstairs.

"Katinka? Andy? Andy? Katinka?" responded Pelleas politely.

"Now, one would think you were never in love

yourself," I chided him, and fell planning what on earth they would live on. Why are so many little people with nothing at all to live on always in love — when every one knows spinster after spinster with an income apiece?

I was not long in doubt about Katinka. The very next morning I came upon her in the hall, her arms filled with kindling for the parlour fire. I followed her. Her dear, bright little face and yellow braids reminded me of the kind of doll that they never make any more.

"Katinka," said I, lingering shamelessly, "do you put the sticks in across or up and down?"

For it may very well be upon this nice question as well as Angora cats that Pelleas and I will have our final disagreement, which let no one suppose that we will really ever have.

She looked up to answer me. The gingham bib of her apron fell down. And there, pinned to her tight little waist, I beheld — a button-picture of Andy! Never tell me that there does not abide in the air a race of little creatures whose sole duty it is to unveil all such secrets to make glad the gray world. Never tell me that it is such a very gray world either, if you wish my real opinion.

She looked down and espied the exposed mystery. She cast a frightened glance at me and I suppose that she saw me, who am a very foolish old woman, smiling

with all my sympathetic might. At all events she gasped and sat down among the kindling, and said: —

"Oh, ma'am, we're agoin' to be marrit to-morrow. An' Mis' Bethune — I'm so scairt to tell 'er."

I sat down too and caught my breath. This blessed generation. I had been wondering if these two were in love and on what they could live when at last they should make up their minds and lo, they were to be married to-morrow.

"Why, Katinka!" said I; "where?"

The little maid-of-all-work sobbed in her apron.

"I do' know, ma'am," she said. "Andy, he's boardin' so, an' I'm a orphing. I t'ought," mentioned Katinka, still sobbing, "maybe Mis' Bethune'd let us stand up by the dinin'-room windy. The hangin' lamp there looks some like a weddin' bell, Andy t'ought."

The hanging lamp had an orange shade and was done in dragons.

"When I see you an' him las' night," Katinka went on, motioning with her stubby thumb toward the absent Pelleas, "I t'ought maybe you'd sign fer seein' it done. I tol' Andy so. Mis' Bethune, I guess she'll be rarin'. I wanted it to be in the kitchen, but Andy, he's so proud. His pa was in dry goods," said Katinka, wiping her eyes at the mere thought.

Here was a most delicious business thrown, as it

were, fairly in my arms. I hailed it with delight, and sat holding my elbows and planning with all my might.

"Katinka," said I portentously, "you leave *where* you are to be married to me."

"Oh, ma'am!" said Katinka.

I never had more earnest appreciation.

Cousin Diantha Bethune was heard calling her at that moment, and Katinka went off with the coals quite as if the next day were not to see her a bride, married in the parlour.

For I was determined that the wedding should be in the parlour, and I spent a most feverish day. I made repeated visits to the kitchen and held consultations with the little maid, whose cheeks grew rosy and whose eyes grew bright at the heaven of having some one in the world interested in her.

While she washed the dishes she told me that she and Andy had saved enough to live for three months at Mis' Slocum's boarding house. After that the future was a pleasant but indefeasible mystery. While she cleaned the knives I slipped down to find whether Andy had remembered to engage the parson; and he had done so, but at the risk of having the ceremony performed in the scullery as the only available apartment. Andy, it appeared, objected to being married at the parson's house; and Katinka seemed to think that this also was because his

father had been "in dry goods." At our last conference, during lamp cleaning, I advised Katinka to break the news to Cousin Diantha Bethune immediately after supper when we were still at table. Katinka promised and her mouth quivered at the thought.

"She'll never hev us in the parlour, not in this world, ma'am," she said to me hopelessly, "not with that new three-ply ingrain on the floor."

Meanwhile I had told Pelleas who, though he is sometimes disposed to pretend to scoff at romance which he does not himself discover, was yet adequately sympathetic. At supper we were both absurdly excited, and Pelleas heaped little attentions on Andy who ate nothing and kept brushing imaginary flies from before his face to show how much at ease he was. And after the last plate of hot bread had been brought in I wonder now at my own self-possession; for I knew thereafter that little Katinka, by the crack in the pantry door, was waiting the self-imposed signal of Cousin Diantha's folded napkin. When this came she popped into the room like a kind of toy and stood directly back of Cousin Diantha's chair.

"Please, ma'am," she said, "Andy an' me's goin' to get marrit."

Andy, one blush, rose and shambled spryly to her

side and caught at her hand and stood with glazing eyes.

Cousin Diantha wheeled in her chair and her plate danced on the table. My heart was in my mouth and I confess that I was prepared for a dudgeon such as only mistresses know when maids have the temerity to wish to marry. In that moment I found, to my misery, that I had forgotten every one of my arguments about young love and the way of the world and the durability of three-ply ingrain carpets, and I did nothing but sit trembling and fluttering for all the world as if it were my own wedding at stake. I looked beseechingly at Pelleas, and he nodded and smiled and rubbed his hands under the tablecloth — O, I could not have loved a man who would look either judicious or doubtful as do too many at the very mention of any one's marriage but their own.

Dimly I saw Cousin Diantha look over her spectacles; I heard her amazed "Bless us, Katinka! What *are* you talking about?" And I half heard the little maid add "To-morrow" quite without expression as she turned to leave the room, loyally followed by Andy. And then, being an old woman and no longer able to mask my desire to interfere in everything, I was about to have the last word when Cousin Diantha turned to me and spoke: —

"Listen at that!" she cried; "listen at that! To-

morrow — an' not a scrap o' cake in this house! An' a real good fruit cake had ought to be three months old at the least. I declare, it don't seem as if a wedding could be *legal* on sponge cake!"

I could hardly believe my ears. Not a word against the parlour, no mention of the three-ply ingrain nor any protest at all. Cousin Diantha's one apprehension was concerning the legality of weddings not solemnized in the presence of a three-months-old fruit cake. The mince-pie-and-plum-pudding branch of our family had risen to the occasion as nobly as if she had been steeped in sentiment.

Upstairs Pelleas and I laughed and well-nigh cried about it.

"And Pelleas," I told him, "Pelleas, you see it doesn't matter in the least whether it's romance or cooking that's accountable so long as your heart is right."

So it was settled; and I lay long awake that night and planned which door they should come in and what flowers I could manage and what I could find for a little present. Here at last, I thought triumphantly as I was dropping asleep, was a chance to overcome Nichola by the news that I had actually found another wedding at which to wear my white lady's-cloth gown.

With that I sat suddenly erect, fairly startled from my sleep.

What was Katinka to wear?

Alas, I have never been so firmly convinced that I am really seventy as when I think how I remembered even the parson and yet could forget Katinka's wedding gown.

Immediately I roused Pelleas.

"Pelleas!" I cried, "what do you suppose that dear child can be married in?"

Pelleas awoke with a logical mind.

"In the parlour, I thought," said he.

"But what will she wear, Pelleas?" I inquired feverishly; "what can she wear? I don't suppose the poor child —"

"I thought she looked very well to-night," he submitted sleepily; "couldn't she wear that?" And drifted into dreams.

Wear *that!* The little tight black frock in which she served. Really, for a man who is adorable, Pelleas at times can seem stupid enough, though he never really is stupid.

I lay for a little while looking out the high window at the Paddington stars which some way seemed unlike town stars. And on a sudden I smiled back at them, and lay smiling at them for a long time. For little Katinka was very nearly my size and I knew what she was to wear at her wedding. My white lady's-cloth gown.

As soon as her work was done next morning I called

her to my room. It was eleven o'clock and she was to be married at twelve.

"Katinka," said I solemnly, "what are you going to wear, child, to be married in?"

She looked down at the tight little black gown.

"I t'ought o' that," said the poor little thing uncertainly, "but I haven't got nothink nicer than what this is."

She had thought of that. The tears were in my eyes as I turned to the cretonne curtain and pulled it aside.

"Look, Katinka," I said; "you are going to wear this."

There hung the white lady's-cloth in all its bravery of chiffon and fichu and silver buttons. Katinka looked once at that splendour and smiled patiently, as one who is wonted to everything but surprises.

"La, ma'am," she humoured me, pretending to appreciate my jest.

When at last she understood, the poor little soul broke down and cried on the foot of the bed. I know of no sadder sight than the tears of one to whom they are the only means of self-expression.

Never did gown fit so beautifully. Never was one of so nearly the proper length. Never was such elegance. When she was quite ready, the red ring and red bracelet having been added at her request, Katinka stood on a chair to have a better view in the

little mirror above my washbasin, and she stepped down awe-struck.

"O, ma'am," she said in a whisper, "I look like I was ready to be laid out."

Then she went to the poor, tawdry things of her own which she had brought to my room, and selected something. It was a shabby plush book decorated with silk flowers and showing dog-eared gilt leaves.

"I t'ought I'd carry this here," she said shyly.

I opened the book. And my eye fell on these words written in letters which looked as if they had been dropped on the page from a sieve: —

> There may be sugar and there may be spice
> But you are the one I shall ever call nice.

It was an autograph album.

"Why, Katinka," I said, "what for?"

"Well," she explained, "I know in the fashion pictures brides allus carries books. I ain't got no other book than what this is. An' this was mother's book — it's all of hers I've got — and I t'ought — "

"Carry it, child," I said, and little Katinka went down the stairs with the album for a prayer-book.

And lo! as the door opened my heart was set beating. For there was music; the reed organ in the parlour was played furiously; and I at once realized that Pelleas was presiding, performing the one tune that he knows: The long-meter doxology.

The parlour blinds were open, the geraniums had been brought up from the cellar to grace the sills, and as crowning symbol of festivity Cousin Diantha had shaken about the room a handkerchief wet with cologne. Miss Waitie had contributed the presence of her best dress. Andy, blushing, waited by the window under the transferred wedding bell of dragons, pretending to talk with the parson and continually brushing imaginary flies from before his face. When he saw Katinka he changed countenance and fairly joined in the amazed "Ah!" of the others. Indeed the parson began the ceremony with Andy's honest eyes still reverently fixed on Katinka's gown.

There was but one break in the proceedings. Pelleas, at Cousin Diantha's urgent request attempting to play softly through the ceremony, reckoned without one of the keys which stuck fast with a long, buzzing sound and could not be released though every one had a hand at it. And finally Katinka herself, who had dusted the keyboard for so long that she understood it, had to come to the rescue while the parson waited for her "I will."

As for me, by the time that it was all over I was crying softly behind the stove with as much enjoyment as if I had been Katinka's mother. And not until I bent my head to hide a tear did I perceive that I had not changed my gown that morning.

As if because one is seventy that is reason for losing one's self-respect!

Pelleas put the rest in my head.

"Etarre," he said, while we were having cherry sauce and seedcakes after the ceremony, "you've got your gray gown, haven't you?"

"Why, yes," said I, not understanding.

"And you don't really need that white one. . . ." He hesitated.

I saw what he meant. We looked across at the little bride, speechlessly happy in my old woman's finery.

"Not a bit," I said, loving Pelleas for his thought.

We smiled at each other with the tidings of a new secret.

That is why, when we reached home three nights later, we permitted Nichola to unpack our trunk and had no fear. The white lady's-cloth gown was not there.

XI

THE CHRISTENING

THE christening of Enid's baby, delayed until David's return from Washington, was to be at our house because Enid and her little son had already come to us, but we, being past seventy, could not so easily go up in Connecticut to Enid. At all events that was what they told us, though Pelleas and I smiled somewhat sadly as we permitted our age to bear the burden of our indolence. Besides, I would always be hostess rather than guest, for the hostess seems essentially creative and the guest pathetically the commodity.

Therefore on a day in May we rose early and found our shabby drawing-room a kind of temple of hyacinths, and every one in the room — by whom I mean its permanent inhabitants — rejoicing. The marble Ariadne, on a pedestal in a dark corner, guided her panther on a field of jonquils which they two must have preferred to asphodel; the Lady Hamilton who lived over the low shelves folded her hands above a very home of Spring; and once, having for a moment turned away, I could have been certain that the

blindfold Hope above the mantel smote her harp softly, just loud enough, say, for a daffodil to hear.

"Ah, Pelleas," I cried, "one would almost say that this is *The Day* — you know, the day that one is expecting all one's life and that never comes precisely as one planned."

"Only," Pelleas supplemented positively, "this is much nicer than that day."

"Much," I agreed, and we both laughed like children waiting to be christened ourselves.

Pelleas was to be godfather — I said by virtue of his age, but Enid, whose words said backward I prefer to those of many others in their proper order, insisted that it was by office of his virtue. There were to be present only the Chartres' and the Cleatams, Miss Lillieblade and Lisa and Hobart Eddy and a handful besides — all our nearest and dearest and no one else; although, "Ah, me," cried Madame Sally Chartres while we waited, "haven't you invited every one who has lately invited *you* to a christening?" And on, so to speak, our positive negative, she added: "Really, I would have said that in these social days no one is even asked to a funeral who has not very recently had a sumptuous funeral of her own."

"Who was *my* godfather?" Pelleas asked morosely. "I don't think I ever had a godfather. I don't know that I ever was christened. Have I any proof that

I was named what I was named? I only know it by hearsay. And how glaringly unscientific."

"You are only wanting," cried Madame Polly Cleatam, shaking her curls, "to be fashionably doubtful!"

"Religions have been thrown away by persons who had no more authentic doubts," Pelleas gravely maintained.

"I dare say," Miss Lillieblade piped. "In these days if a man has an old coat he puts on a new doubt, and society is satisfied."

Thereafter the baby arrived, a mere collection of hand embroidery and lace, with an angel in the midst of these soft billows. The baby looked quite like a photograph made by the new school, with the high lights on long sweeping skirts and away up at the top of the picture a vague, delicious face. Our grandniece Enid is an adorable little mother, looking no less like a mermaid than does Lisa, but with a light in her eyes as if still more of the mystery of the sea were come upon her. And, as a mer-mother should, she had conversation not exclusively confined to the mer-child. I heard her on the subject of prints with the bishop's lady, and the mer-child was not three months old.

The christening was to have been at eleven o'clock, and at twelve Pelleas had an appointment which it was impossible to delay, or so he thought, having a

most masculine regard for hours, facts, and the like. Therefore when, at fifteen after eleven, the bishop had not yet arrived, Pelleas began uneasily suggesting taking leave. Enid looked at him with a kind of deep-sea-cave reproach before which every one else would have been helpless; but Pelleas, whose nature is built on straight lines, patted her and kissed the baby at large upon the chest and, benign, was still inexorable.

"But who will be godfather?" Enid cried disconsolately, and, young-wife-like, looked reproachfully at her young husband.

At that moment the hall door, as if it had been an attentive listener as long as it could and must now give the true answer, opened and admitted Hobart Eddy, come late to the christening and arrived with that vague air of asking why he was where he was which lent to him all the charm of *ennui* without its bad taste.

"Hobart," Enid cried ecstatically, "*you* shall be godfather!"

Hobart Eddy continued to bend to kiss my hand and then sought the hand of Madame Sally and next the hand of Madame Polly Cleatam. Finally he bowed before Enid and fixed his monocle on the baby.

"It opens and shuts its eyes," he earnestly observed; "how these baby people imitate the doll factories. It's disgraceful."

"Kiss him!" the mer-mother commanded, as if she were the prompter.

Hobart Eddy obediently kissed the baby's thumb.

"Man and brother," he greeted him solemnly; "Lord, to think I'll take it to luncheon sometime and hear it know more about the town than I do."

"At all events," Madame Sally Chartres begged gravely, "don't ask him to lunch until he's been christened. In Society you have to have a name."

"But," Enid settled it with pretty peremptoriness, "you must be godfather even if he never lunches. Hobart — you will?"

"Its godfather?" said Hobart Eddy. "I? But yes, with all pleasure. What do I have to do? Is there more than one figure?"

When at length the arrival of the bishop followed close on the departure of Pelleas, regretful but absurdly firm, we were in a merry clamour of instruction. The situation had caught our fancy and this was no great marvel. For assuredly Hobart Eddy was not the typical godfather.

"On my honour," he said, "I never was even 'among those' at a christening, in my life, and I would go a great distance to be godfather. It's about the only ambition I've never had and lost."

The service of the christening holds for me a poignant solemnity. And because this was Enid's baby and because I remembered that hour in which

he had seemed to be Pelleas' dream and mine come back, my heart was overflowingly full. But I missed Pelleas absurdly, for this was one of the hours in which we listen best together; and to have learned to listen with some one brings, in that other's absence, a silence. But it was a happy hour, for the sun streamed gayly across the window-boxes, there were the dear faces of our friends, the mer-mother and her young husband were near to joyful tears and the bishop's voice was like an organ chord in finer, fluttering melody. Through the saying of prayer and collects I stood with uplifting heart; and then Enid's husband gave the baby's name with a boyish tremble in his voice; and after the baptism and its formalities the bishop read the words that were the heart of the whole matter; and the heart of a matter does not always beat in the moment's uplift.

"'*And thou, Child,' the bishop read, 'shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways.*

"'*Through the tender mercy of our Lord, whereby the day spring from on high hath visited us.*

"'*To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*'"

As he read a hush fell upon us. It seemed suddenly as if our conventional impulse to see Enid's baby christened was an affair of more radiant import than

we had meant. From the words of exhortation that followed I was roused by a touching of garments, and I looked up to see a trim, embroidered maid holding the baby toward Hobart Eddy. The moment for his service as godfather was come. As he held out his arms he questioned Enid briefly with his eyes, and then earnestly gave himself to establishing the little man and brother in a curve of elbow. It was after all, I suppose him to have been reflecting, as sternly required of a man that he be an efficient godfather as that he perfectly fill all the other offices of a man of the world. I even suspected him of a downward glance to be assured that the soft skirts were gracefully in place, quite as if he were arranging *tableaux vivants*. Thereafter he stood erect, with his complaisant passivity of look, as perfectly the social automaton as if the baby were a cup of tea. Really, to accept dear Hobart Eddy as godfather was rather like filling a champagne glass with cream.

"What shall be the name of this child?" once more demanded the bishop.

"Philip Wentworth," prompted the young father a second time, presenting a serious, young-father profile to the world.

The bishop waited.

"Philip Wentworth," obediently repeated Hobart Eddy with, I dare be sworn, the little deferential

stooping of the shoulders with which I had seen him return many and many a fan.

The bishop, his face filled with that shining which even in gravity seemed sweeter than the smile of another, fixed his deep eyes upon the godfather, and when he spoke it was as if he were saying the words for the first time, to the guardian of the first child: —

"'Dost thou, in the name of this Child, renounce . . . the vain pomp and glory of this world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the sinful desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not follow nor be led by them?'"

Hobart, his eyes fixed on the open prayer-book which he held, read the response quickly and clearly:

"'I renounce them all, and by God's help I will endeavour not to follow or be led by them.'"

"'Wilt thou, then,'" pursued the bishop benignly, "'obediently keep God's holy will and commandments and walk in the same all the days of thy life?'"

"'I will,'" said Hobart Eddy, "'by God's help.'"

There was no slightest hesitation, no thought, or so it seemed to me; only the old urbane readiness to say what was required of him. What had he said, what had he done, this young lion of the social moment, beau, gallant, *dilettante*, and was it possible that he did not understand what he had promised? Or was I a stupid and exacting old woman taking with convulsive literalness that which all the world per-

haps recognizes as a form of promise for the mere civilized upbringing of a child? I tried to remember other godfathers and I could remember only those who, like Pelleas, had indeed served, as Enid had said in jest, by office of their virtue. And yet Hobart Eddy — after all I told myself he was a fine, upright young fellow who paid his debts, kept his engagements, whose name was untouched by a breath of scandal, who lived clear of gossip; so I went through the world's dreary catalogue of the primal virtues. But what had these to do with that solemn "I renounce them all"?

By the time that the service was well over I could have found it in my heart to proclaim to our guests that, as the world construed it, a christening seemed to me hardly more vital than the breakfast which would follow.

This however I forbore; and at the end every one pressed forward in quite the conventional way and besieged the baby and Hobart and showered congratulations upon them both and kissed Enid and was as merry as possible. And as for Hobart, he stood in their midst, bowing a little this way and that, giving his graceful flatteries as another man gives the commonplaces, complaisant, urbane, heavy-lidded. . . .

I omitted the baby and looked straight at the godfather.

"How do you like the office?" I asked somewhat dryly.

He met my eyes with his level look.

"Dear friend," he said softly, "you see how inefficient I am. Even to describe your charming christening toilet is my despair."

"Hobart Eddy," said I sharply, "take Enid in to breakfast."

While May was still stepping about the fields loath to leave her business of violets and ladywort, Madame Sally Chartres sent pleasant word from Long Island that a dozen or more of her friends were to spend a day with her, and no one would willingly disregard the summons. The Chartres' lived on the edge of an orchard and another edge of field. I dare say they lived in a house although what I chiefly remember is a colonnade of white pillars, a library shelved to the ceiling, and a sprinkling of mighty cushioned window seats whereon the sun forever streamed through lattices. Perhaps Madame Sally and Wilfred had assembled these things near an orchard and considered that to be house enough. At all events there could have been no fairer place for a Spring holiday.

Pelleas and I went down by train, and the morning was so golden that I wholly expected to divine a procession of nymphs defiling faintly across the fields in a cloud of blossoms rooted in air. I have often

wondered why goblins, dryads and the like do not more frequently appear to folk on railway trains. These shy ones would be quite safe, for by the time the bell rope should have been pulled and the conductor told why the train must be stopped and the engine and cars brought effectually to a standstill, the little shadowy things could have vanished safely against the blue. Perhaps they do not understand how sadly long it takes a spirit to influence the wheels of civilization.

The others coached down to the Chartres' with Hobart Eddy, although there must be made one important exception: Madame Sally had insisted that Enid bring the baby; and Enid and her husband, who since the christening were lingering on in town, had given the baby and his new nurse to the charge of Pelleas and me. We arrived ahead of the coach and stood on the veranda to welcome the others.

Lisa was among these, with Eric at her side; and Madame Polly and Horace Cleatam and Miss Lillieblade, all three in spite of their white hair and anxiety about draughts stoutly refusing to ride inside. There were four or five others, and from the box seat beside Hobart Eddy I saw descending with what I am bound to call picturesque deliberation a figure whom I did not remember.

"Pray who is that?" there was time for me to ask Madame Sally.

"My dear," she answered hurriedly, "she is a Mrs. Trempleau. I used to love her mother. And Hobart wanted her here."

"Hobart!" I exclaimed. "That Mrs. Trempleau?" I comprehended. "You don't think . . ." I intimated.

Madame Sally's eyebrows were more expressive than the eyes of many.

"Who knows?" she said only, and made of her eyebrows a positive welcome to our friends.

Mrs. Trempleau came toward us flickering prettily — I protest that she reminded me of a thin flame, luminous, agile, seeking. She had hair like the lights in agate, and for its sake her gown and hat were of something coloured like the reflection of the sun in a shield of copper. She had a fashion of threading her way through an hour of talk, lighting a jest here, burning a bit of irony there, smouldering dangerously near the line of daring. And that day as she moved from group to group on the veranda the eyes of us all, of whom Hobart Eddy was chief, were following her. I think it may have been because her soul was of some alien element like the intense, avid spirit of the flames, though when I told Pelleas he argued that it was merely the way she lifted her eyes.

"Where is *Mr.* Trempleau?" Pelleas added, his nature as I have said being built on straight lines.

"There may be one," I answered, "but I think he lives on some other continent."

Pelleas reflected.

"Hobart Eddy and Pelham and Clox look in love with her," he said; "if she doesn't take care there won't be enough continents."

In no small amusement during luncheon we watched Hobart Eddy, especially Pelleas and I who, however, besides being amused, were also a little sad. Mrs. Trempleau's appropriation of him was insistent but very pretty. Indeed, if she had on a night of stars appropriated Sirius I dare say the constellations would have sung approval. She had the usual gift of attractive faults. But above Mrs. Trempleau's shoulders and beyond the brightness of her hair I had, at luncheon, glimpses which effectually besought my attention from the drama within. The long windows overlooked the May orchards, white and sweet and made like youth, and I was impatient to be free of the woman's little darting laughs and away to the fields. Some way, in her presence it was not like May.

Therefore, when Pelleas had been borne to the stables by his host and when the others had wandered back to the veranda, I went away down what I think must have been a corridor, though all that I remember is a long open window leading to the Spring, as if one were to unlatch an airy door and reveal a diviner

prospect than our air infolds. A lawn, cut by a gravel walk bounded by tulips, sloped away from this window to the orchard and I crossed the green in the frank hope that the others would not seek me out. But when I turned the corner by the dial I came fairly on two other wanderers. There, with the white-embroidered nurse-maid, sat, like another way of expressing the Spring, Enid's baby. Was ever such happy chance befallen at the gate of any May orchard whatever?

"Ah," I cried to the little nurse, "Bonnie! Come quickly. I see a place — there — or there — or there — where you must bring the baby at once — at once! Leave the perambulator here — so. He is awake? Then quickly — this way — to the pink crab apple-tree."

I sometimes believe that in certain happy case I find every one beautiful; but I recall that Bonnie — of whom I shall have more to tell hereafter — that day seemed to me so charming that I suspected her of being Persephone, with an inherited trick of caring for the baby as her mother cared for Demophoön.

To the pink crab apple-tree! What a destination. It had for me all the delight of running toward, say, the plane tree in the meadow of Buyukdere. I remember old branches looking like the arms of Pan, wreath-wound, and rooms of sun through which

petals drifted . . . who could distinctly recall the raiment of such an hour? But at length by many aisles we came to a little hollow where the grass was greenest, hard by the orchard arbour, and we stood before the giant pink crab-apple tree. Has any one ever wondered that Sicilian courtiers went out a-shepherding and that the Round Table, warned to green gowns, fared forth a-Maying?

"Spread the baby's rug!" I cried to Bonnie; "here is a little seat made in the roots for this very day. Pull him a branch of apple blossoms — so. And now run away, child, and amuse yourself. The baby and I are going to make an apple-blossom pie."

Bonnie, hesitating, at my more peremptory bidding went away. I have no idea whether she was caught up among the branches by friendly hands or whether the nearest tree trunk hospitably opened to receive her. But there, in May, with the world gone off in another direction, the baby and I sat alone.

"O—o-o-o-o —" said the baby, in a kind of lyric understanding of the situation.

I held him close. These hours of Arcady are hard to win for the sheltering of dreams.

Voices, sounding beyond a momentary rain of petals, roused me. Enid's baby smiled up in my eyes but I saw no one, though the voices murmured on as if the dryads had forgotten me and were idly

speaking from tree to tree. Then I caught from the orchard arbour Mrs. Trempleau's darting laugh. It was as if some one had kindled among the apple blossoms a torch of perfumed wood.

"I am sailing on Wednesday," I heard her saying in a voice abruptly brought to sadness. "Ah, my friend, if I might believe you. Would there indeed be happiness for you there with me, counting the cost?"

It was of course Hobart Eddy who answered quite, I will be bound, as I would have said that Hobart Eddy would speak of love: with fine deliberation, as another man would speak the commonplaces, possibly with his little half bow over the lady's hand, a very courtier of Love's plaisance.

She replied with that perpetual little snare of her laughter laid like a spider web from one situation to the next.

"Come with me then," she challenged him; "let us find this land where it is always Spring."

"Do you mean it?" asked Hobart Eddy.

I do not know what she may have said to this, for the new note in his voice terrified me. Neither do I know what his next words were, but their deliberation had vanished and in its stead had come something, a pulse, a tremor. . . .

I remember thinking that I must do something, that it was impossible that I should not do anything. I looked helplessly about the great empty

orchard with its mock-sentinel trees, and down into Enid's baby's eyes. And on a sudden I caught him in my arms and lifted him high until his head was within the sweetness of the lowest boughs. He did what any baby in the world would have done in that circumstance; he laughed aloud with a little coo and crow at the end so that anybody in that part of the orchard, for example, must have heard him with delight.

The two in the orchard arbour did hear. Mrs. Trempleau leaned from the window.

"Ah," she cried, in her pretty soaring emphasis, "what a picture!"

"Is he not?" I answered, and held the baby high. On which she said some supreme nonsense about Elizabeth and the little John and "Hobart — see!" she cried.

The two came out of the arbour, and Mrs. Trempleau made little dabs at the baby and then went picturesquely about filling her arms with blossoms. Hobart Eddy threw himself on the grass beside me and watched her. I looked at them all: at the woman who was like thin flame, at the man who watched her, indolent, confident, plainly allured, and at Enid's baby. And,

"There," said I, abruptly to the baby, "is your godfather."

Hobart Eddy turned on his elbow and offered him one finger.

"It's like being godfather to a rose," he said smiling, and his smile had always the charm and spontaneity of his first youth.

"When the rose is twenty-one," said I, "and this luncheon party which I heard you prophesying the other day comes off, what sort of godfather will you be then, do you think?"

"What sort am I now, for that matter?" he asked idly.

"Ah, well, then," said I boldly; "yes! What sort are you now?"

When one is past seventy and may say what one pleases one is not accountable for any virtue of daring.

He looked at me quickly but I did not meet his eyes. I was watching Mrs. Trempleau lay the apple boughs against her gown.

"Ah, pray don't," he besought. "You make me feel as if there were things around in the air waiting to see if I would do right or wrong with them."

"There are," said I, "if you want me to be disagreeable."

"But I!" he said lightly. "What have I to decide? Whether to have elbow bits on the leaders for the coaching Thursday. Whether to give Eric his dinner party on the eighth or the nineteenth. Whether to risk the frou-frou figure at Miss Lillie-

blade's cotillon. You don't wish me to believe that anything in the air is concerned with how I am deciding those?"

"No," said I with energy, "not in the air or on the earth or under the sea."

"Ah, well, now," he went on with conviction, and gave to the baby a finger of each hand — beautiful, idle, white fingers round which the baby's curled and clung, "what can I do?" He put it to me with an air of great fairness.

With no warning I found myself very near to tears for the pity of it. I laid my cheek on the baby's head and when I spoke I am not even sure that Hobart Eddy heard all I was saying.

". . . 'in the name of this child,'" I repeated, "was there not something 'in the name of this child' — something of renouncing — and of not following after nor being led by . . ."

For a moment he looked up at me blankly, though still with all his urbanity, his conformity, his chivalrous attention.

"I'm not preaching," said I briskly, "but a gentleman keeps his word, and dies if need be for the sake of his oath, does he not? Whether it chances to be about a bet, or a horse, or — or a sea lion. For my own part, as a woman of the world, I cannot see why on earth he should not keep it about a christening."

Hobart Eddy turned toward me, seeking to free his fingers of that little clinging clasp.

"Jove," he said helplessly, "do they mean it *that* way?"

"'That way,'" I cried, past the limit of my patience. "I dare say that very many people who are married would be amazed if they were told that their oath had been meant 'that way.' But they would sell their very days to pay a debt at bridge. 'That way'! Let me ask you, Hobart Eddy, if 'I will, by God's help' does not mean quite as much at a marriage or a christening as it does in society?"

And at that Enid's baby, missing the outstretched fingers, suddenly leaned toward him, smiling and eager, uttering the most inane and delicious little cries. A baby without genius would simply have paid no attention.

Hobart Eddy took the baby in his arms and looked down at him with something in his face which I had never seen there before. The baby caught at his hand and pulled at the cord of his monocle and stared up at the low blossoming boughs. As for me I fell gathering up stray petals in a ridiculous fashion and I knew that my hands were trembling absurdly.

I looked up as Mrs. Trempleau came toward us. She was dragging a burden of flowering branches and she looked some priestess of the sun gone momentarily about the offices of the blossoming earth.

"Ah, the baby!" she cried. "Let me have the baby."

Hobart Eddy had risen and had helped me to rise; and I fancy that he and Enid's baby and I hardly heard Mrs. Trempleau's pretty urgency. But when she let fall the flowers and held out her arms, Hobart looked at her and did not let the baby go.

"This little old man and I," he said, "we understand each other. And we're going to walk together, if you don't mind."

On Wednesday Mrs. Trempleau sailed for Cherbourg alone. But when I told Pelleas the whole matter he shook his head.

"If those two had intended eloping," he said, "all the christenings in Christendom wouldn't have prevented."

"Pelleas!" I said, "I am certain —"

"If those two had intended to elope," he patiently began it all over again, "all the —"

"Pelleas," I urged, "I don't believe it!"

"If those two —" I heard him trying to say.

"Pelleas!" I cried finally, "*you* don't believe it either!"

"Ah, well, no," he admitted, "I don't know that I do."

XII

AN INTERLUDE

We saw Mrs. Trempleau once afterward — it was the following Autumn in the Berkshires — and of that time I must turn aside to tell. But the story is of Mrs. Trempleau's little girl, Margaret.

Pelleas and I had gradually come to admit that Margaret knew many things of which we had no knowledge. This statement may very well be received either as proof of our madness or as one of the pastimes of our age; but we are reconciled to having both our pastimes and our fancies disregarded. We were certain that there are extensions of the experiences of every day which we missed and little Margaret understood.

This occurred to us the first time that we saw her. We were sitting on the veranda of a boarding house where we were come with Miss Willie Lillieblade to be her guests for a week. The boarding house was kept by a Quakeress, as famous for her asters as for her pasties. Mrs. Trempleau, who was there when we arrived ("She is like a flash of something, would thee not say?" observed the gentle Quakeress, "and

she calls the child only, thee will have marked, 'Run away now, Dearness.'") — Mrs. Trempleau had just driven away in a high trap with orange wheels and a slim blond youth attached, when Margaret came up to the veranda from the garden.

"Smell," she said to me.

As I stooped over the wax-white scentless blossoms in the child's hand, I thought of that chorus of the flower girls in one of the Italian dramas: "Smell! Smell! Smell!"

"What are they, dear?" I asked, taking care not to shake her confidence by looking at her.

"I don't know," she said; "but O, smell!"

But though I held the flowers to my face I, who can even detect the nameless fragrance of old lace, could divine in them no slightest perfume. I held them toward Pelleas, dozing in a deep chair, and when he had lifted them to his face he too shook his head.

"It is strange," he said; "I would say that they have no odour."

"They've such a beautiful smell," said the child, sighing, and took back her flowers with that which immediately struck Pelleas and me as a kind of pathetic resignation. It was as if she were wonted to having others fail to share her discoveries and as if she had approached us with the shy hope that we might understand. But we had failed her!

"Won't you sit down here with us?" said I, dimly

conscious of this and wistful to make amends. It is a very commonplace tragedy to fail to meet other minds — their fancies, their humour, their speculation — but I am loath to add to tragedy and I always do my best to understand.

We tried her attention that day with all that we knew of fairy stories and vague lore. She listened with the closest regard to what we offered but she was neither impressed nor, one would have said, greatly diverted by our most ingenious inventions. Yet she was by no means without response — we were manifestly speaking her language, but a language about which Pelleas and I had a curious impression that she knew more than we knew. It was as if she were listening to things which she already understood in the hope that we might let fall something novel about them. This we felt that we signally failed to do. Yet there was after all a certain *rapport* and the child evidently felt at ease with us.

"Come and see us to-morrow morning," we begged when she left us. For having early ascertained that there was not a single pair of lovers in the house, possible or estranged, we cast about for other magic. In the matter of lack o' love in that boarding house we felt as did poor Pepys when he saw not a handsome face in the Sabbath congregation: "It seems," he complained, "as if a curse were fallen upon the

parish." Verily, a country house without ever one pair of lovers is an anomaly ill to be supported. But this child was a gracious little substitute and we waited eagerly to see if she would return to us.

Not only did she return but she brought us food for many a day's wonder. Next morning she came round the house in the sunshine and she was looking down as if she were leading some one by the hand. She lifted her eyes to us from the bottom step.

"I've brought my little sister to see you," she said.

Then she came up the steps slowly as if she were helping uncertain feet to mount.

"Halverson can't get up so very fast," she explained, and seated herself on the top step holding one little arm as if it were circling some one.

Pelleas and I looked at each other in almost shy consternation. We are ourselves ready with the maddest fancies and we readily accept the imaginings of others — and even, if we are sufficiently fond of them, their facts. But we are not accustomed to being distanced on our own ground.

"Your — little sister?" said I, as naturally as I was able.

"Yes," she assented with simplicity, "Halverson. She goes with me nearly all over. But she don't like to come to see peoples, very well."

At this I was seized with a kind of breathlessness and trembling. It is always wonderful to be received

into the secrets of a child's play; but here, we instinctively felt, was something which Margaret did not regard as play.

"How old is she?" Pelleas asked. (Ah, I thought, even in my excitement and interest, suppose I had been married to a man who would have felt it necessay to say, "But, my dear little girl, there is no one there!")

"She is just as old as I am," explained Margaret; "we was borned together. Sometimes I've thought," she added shyly, "wouldn't it 'a' been funny if I'd been made the one you couldn't see and Halverson'd been me?"

Yes, we agreed, finding a certain relief in the smile that she expected; that would have been funny.

"Then," she continued, "it 'd 'a' been Halverson that 'd had to be dressed up and have her face washed an' a cool bath, 'stead o' me. I often *rish* it could be the other way round."

She looked pensively down and her slim little hand might have been straying over somebody's curls.

"They isn't no 'ticular use in bein' *saw*," she observed, "an' Halverson's got everything else but just that."

"But can — can she talk?" Pelleas asked gravely.

"She can, to me," the child answered readily, "but I do just as well as more would. I can tell what she

says. An' I *always* understand her. She couldn't be sure other folks would hear her — right."

Then the most unfortunate thing that could have happened promptly came about. Humming a little snatch of song and drawing on her gloves Mrs. Trempleau idled down the long piazza. She greeted us, shook out her lace parasol, and saw Margaret.

"My darling!" she cried; "go in at once to your practicing. And don't come out again *please* until you've found a fresh hair ribbon."

The child rose without a word. Pelleas and I looked to see her run down the steps, readily forgetful of her pretence about the little sister. Instead, she went down as she had mounted, with an unmistakable tender care of little feet that might stumble.

"Run on, Dearness! Don't be so stupid!" cried Mrs. Trempleau fretfully; but the child proceeded serenely on her way and disappeared down the aster path, walking as if she led some one whom we did not see.

"She is at that absurd play again," said the woman impatiently; "really, I didn't know she ever bored strangers with it."

"Does she often play so, madame?" Pelleas asked, following her for a few steps on the veranda.

Mrs. Trempleau shrugged.

"All the time," she said, "O, quite ever since she could talk, she has insisted on this 'sister.' Heaven

knows where she ever got the name. *I* never heard it. She is very tiresome with it — she never forgets her. She saves food for Halverson; she won't go to drive unless there is room for Halverson; she wakes us in the night to get Halverson a drink. Of course I've been to specialists. They say she is fanciful and that she'll outgrow it. But I don't know — she seems to get worse. I used to lock her up, but that did no good. She insisted that I couldn't lock Halverson *out* — the idea! She has stopped talking the nonsense to me, but I can see she's never stopped pretending. When I have my nervous headaches I declare the dear child gives me cold chills."

When she was gone Pelleas and I looked at each other in silence. Between the vulgar skepticism of the mother and the madness of believing that Margaret saw what we did not see, we hesitated not a moment to ally ourselves with the little girl. After all, who are we that we should be prepared to doubt the authority of the fancies of a child?

"They've been to *specialists!*" said Pelleas, shaking his head.

The night was very still, moonless, and having that lack of motion among the leaves which gives to a garden the look of mid-Summer. Pelleas and I stepped through the long glass doors of our sitting room, crossed the veranda and descended to the path.

There we were wont to walk for an hour, looking toward the fields where the farm-house candles spelled out the meaning of the dark as do children instead of giving it forth in one loud, electric word as adults talk. That night we were later than on other nights and the fields were still and black.

"Etarre," Pelleas said, "of course I want to live as long as I can. But more and more I am wildly eager to *understand*."

"I know," I said.

"'I want to see my universe,'" he quoted. "Sometime," he went on, "one of us will know, perhaps, and not be able to tell the other. One of us may know first. Isn't it marvelous that people can talk about anything else? Although," he added, "I'm heartily glad that they can. It is bad enough to hear many of us on the subject of beer and skittles without being obliged to listen to what we have to say on the universe."

I remember a certain judge who was delightful when he talked about machinery and poultry and Chippendale; but the moment that he approached law and order and the cosmic forces every one hoped for dessert or leave-taking. Truly, there are worthy people who would better talk of "love, taste and the musical glasses" and leave the universe alone. But for us whose bread is wonder it is marvelous indeed that we can talk of anything else. Nor do Pelleas

and I often attempt any other subject, "in such a night."

"But I hold to my notion," Pelleas said, "that we might know a great many extraordinary things before we die, if only we would do our best."

"At all events," said I, "we have at least got to be willing to believe them, whether they ever come our way or not. For I dare say that when we die we shall be shown only as many marvels as we are prepared for."

"For example, Nichola —" suggested Pelleas.

At her name we both smiled. Nichola would not believe in darkness itself if it did not cause her to stumble. And she would as soon harbour an understanding of, say, the way of the moon with the tides as she would be credulous of witchcraft. Any comprehension of the results of psychical research would necessitate in Nichola some such extension of thought as death will mean to Pelleas and me. The only mystery for which she has not an instant explanation is death; and even of that she once said: "There ain't much of anything mysterious about it, as I see. It's plain enough that we hev to be born. An' that we can't be kep' goin'. So we die."

No, Nichola would not be prepared for the marvels of afterward. The universe is not "her" universe. But as for Pelleas and me no phenomenon could put us greatly out of countenance or leave us wholly in-

credulous. Therefore as we stepped across the lawn in the darkness we were not too much amazed to hear very near us a little voice, like the voice of some of the little night folk; and obviously in talk with itself.

"No, no," we heard it saying, "I don't fink it would be right. No — it wouldn't be the way folks ought to do. S'posin' everybody went and did so? With theirs?"

It was Margaret. We knew her voice and at the turn of the path we paused, fearing to frighten her. But she had heard our talking and she ran toward us. In the dimness I saw that she wore her little pink bedrobe over her nightgown and her hair was in its bedtime braids.

"Margaret — dear!" I said, for it was late and it must have been hours since she had been left to sleep, "are you alone?"

"No," she answered, "Halverson is here."

She caught my fingers and her little hand was hot.

"Halverson wants me to change places with her," she said.

We found a bench and I held the child in my arms. She was in no excitement but she seemed troubled; and she drew her breath deeply, in that strange, treble sigh which I have known from no other who has not borne great sorrow. Have I said how beautiful she was? And there was about her nothing

sprite-like, no elfin graces, no graces of a kind of angelic childhood such as make one fear for its flowering. She had merely the beauty of the child eternal, the beauty of normal little humankind. That may have been partly why her tranquil talk carried with it all the conviction which for some the commonplace will have.

"Do you think I ought to?" she asked us seriously.

"But see, dear one, how could that be?" I said soothingly. "What would you do — you and Halverson — if you were indeed to change places?"

"I s'pose," she said thoughtfully, "that I should have to die an' then Halverson would come an' be me. An' maybe I might get lost — on the way to being Halverson. But she begs me to change," cried the child; "she — she says I'm not happy. She — she says if I was her I'd be happy."

"Ah, well," said I, "but you are happy, are you not?"

"Not very," she answered, "not since papa went. He knew 'bout Halverson, an' he didn't scold. An' he never laughed 'bout her. Since he went I haven't had anybody to talk to — 'bout *Them*."

"About — whom?" I asked, and I felt for Pelleas' hand in the darkness.

Margaret shook her head, buried against my arm.

"I can't say Them," she confessed, "because nobody has ever told me about them, an' I don't know

how to ask. I can't *say* Them. I can only see Them. I fink my papa could — too."

"Now?" I asked, "can you see —now, Margaret?"

"I can — when I want to," she answered, "I — move something in the back of my head. An' then I see colours that aren't there — before that. An' then I hear what they say — sometimes," said the child; "they make me laugh so! But I can't 'member what it was for. An' I can hear music sometimes — an' when flowers don't smell at all I — do that way to the back of my head an' then the flowers are all 'fumery. I always try if other people can do that to flowers. You couldn't, you know."

"No," I said, "we couldn't."

"No," said the child, with her little sigh of resignation, "nobody can. But I fink my papa could. Well, an' it's *Them* that Halverson is with. She — I think she *is* 'em. An' she says for me to come an' be 'em, too — an' she'll hev to be me then; 'cause it isn't time yet. An' she'll do the practicin' an' come in for tea when mamma's company's there. She says she's sorry for me an' she don't mind bein' *saw* for a while. Would you go?"

"But how would you do it, dear — how could you do it?" I asked, thinking that the practicality would bring her to the actualities.

"O," said Margaret, simply, "I fink I would just have to move that in the back of my head long enough.

Sometimes I 'most have — but I was 'fraid an' I came back. Something . . ." said the child, "something slips past each other in the back of my head when I want to. . . ."

She threw her head against my breast and closed her eyes.

"Pelleas!" I cried, "O, Pelleas — take her! Let us get her in the house — *quick*."

She opened her eyes as his arms folded about her to lift her.

"Don't go so very fast," she besought sleepily; "Halverson can't go so very fast."

My summons at the door of Mrs. Trempleau's apartment brought no reply. Finally I turned the knob and we entered. The outer room was in darkness, but beyond a light was burning and there was Margaret's bed, its pillow already pressed as if the little head had been there earlier in the evening. Pelleas laid her down tenderly and she did not open her eyes as I rearranged the covers. But when we would have moved a little away she spoke in her clear, childish treble.

"Please don't go," she said, "till Halverson gets asleep. If she'll only go to sleep I'm not 'fraid."

On this we sat by the bed and she threw one arm across the vacant pillow.

"Halverson sleeps there," she said, "but sometimes she keeps me 'wake with her dreams."

It may have been half an hour later when Pelleas and I nodded to each other that, her restlessness having ceased, she would now be safely asleep. In almost the same moment we heard the outer door open and some one enter the room, with a touch of soft skirts. We rose and faced Mrs. Trempleau, standing in the doorway. She was splendid in a glittering gown, her white cloak slipping from her shoulders and a bright scarf wound about her loosened hair.

We told her hurriedly what had brought us to the room, apologizing for our presence, as well we might. She listened with straying eyes, nodded, cast her cloak on a sofa and tried, frowning, to take the scarf from her hair.

"It's all right," she said in her high, irritable voice; "thanks, very much. I'm sorry — the child — has made a nuisance of herself. She promised me she'd go to sleep. I went up to the ball — at the hotel. She promised me —"

Her words trailed vaguely off, and she glanced up at us furtively. And I saw then how flushed her cheeks were and how bright her eyes —

"Margaret promised me she'd go to sleep," she insisted, throwing the scarf on the floor.

And the child heard her name and woke. She sat up, looking at her mother, round-eyed. And at her look Mrs. Trempleau laughed, fumbling at her gloves and nodding at Margaret.

"Dearness," she said, "we're going away from here. You'll have a new father presently who will take us away from here. Don't you look at mother like that — it's all right —"

Over the face of the child as Pelleas and I stood helplessly looking down at her came a strangeness. We thought that she was hardly conscious of our presence. Her eyes seemed rather to deepen than to widen as she looked at her mother, and the woman, startled and unstrung, threw out her hands and laughed weakly and without meaning.

"Mamma!" the child cried, "mamma!" and did not take her eyes from her face, "O, mamma, you look as if you had been dead forever — are you dead? *You are dead!*" cried Margaret. "O, They won't touch you. They are running away from you. You're dead — dead," sobbed the child and threw herself back on her pillow. "O, papa — my papa!"

She stretched her little arm across the vacant pillow beside her.

"Halverson, I will — I will," we heard her say.

As soon as we could we got the little Quakeress, for Mrs. Trempleau fainted and we were in a passion of anxiety for the child. She lay without moving, and when the village physician came he could tell us nothing. We slipped away to our rooms as the East was whitening and I found myself sobbing helplessly.

"She will die," I said; "she knows how to do it —

Pelleas, she knows what we don't know — whatever it is we can't know till we die."

"Etarre!" Pelleas besought me, "I do believe she has made you as fantastic as she." But his voice trembled and his hands trembled. And it was as if we had stood in places where other feet do not go.

But Margaret did not die. She was ill for a long time — at the last languidly, even comfortably ill, able to sit up, to be amused. Mrs. Trempleau was to be married in town, and on the day before the ceremony Pelleas and I went in, as we often did, to sit with Margaret. She was lying on a sofa and in her hands were some white, double lilies at which she was looking half-frowning.

"These don't smell any," she said to us almost at once; "I thought they would. It seems to me they used to smell but I can't — find it now."

She sat happily arranging and rearranging the blossoms until some one who did not know of our presence came through an adjoining room, and called her.

"Margaret! Margaret!"

She did not move nor did she seem to hear.

"They are calling you, dear," Pelleas said.

She looked up at us quickly.

"What did they call me before — do you remember?" she said to us. "It wasn't that."

Of the danger to the child I, in my sudden wild wonder and curiosity, took no thought. I leaned toward her.

"Was it Halverson?" I asked.

Her face brightened.

"Yes," she said, "somebody used to call me that. Why don't they call me that now? What did you say the word is?"

XIII

THE RETURN OF ENDYMION

PELLEAS and I went through the wicket gate with a joyful sense of being invaders. The gate clicked behind us, and we heard the wheels of our cab rolling irretrievably from us, and where we stood the June dusk was deep. We had let ourselves in by a little wicket gate in the corner of the stone wall that ran round Little Rosemont, the Long Island country place where our dear Avis and Lawrence Knight lived. We had come down for a week with them and, having got a later train than we had thought, we found at the station for Little Rosemont no one to meet us. So there we were, entering by that woods' gate and meaning to walk into the house as if we belonged there. Indeed, secretly we were glad that this had so befallen for we dislike arriving no less than we dislike saying good-bye. To my mind neither a book nor a visit, unless it be in uniform, should be begun or ended with a ruffle of drums.

Meanwhile we would have our walk to the house, a half-mile of delight. Before us in the pines was a tiny path doubtless intended, I told Pelleas, to be

used by violets when they venture out to walk, two by two, in the safe night. It was wide enough to accommodate no more than two violets, and Pelleas and I walked singly, he before and I clinging to his hand. The evergreens brushed our faces, we heard a stir of wings, and caught some exquisite odour not intended for human folk to breathe. It was a half-hour to which we were sadly unwonted; for Pelleas and I are nominally denied all sweet adventures of not-yet-seventy, and such as we win we are wont to thieve out-of-hand; like this night walk, on which no one could tell what might happen.

"Pelleas," I said, "it is absurd to suppose that we are merely on our way to a country house for a visit. Don't you think that this kind of path through the woods always leads to something wonderful?"

"I have never known it to fail," Pelleas said promptly. For Pelleas is not one of the folk who when they travel grow just tired enough to take a kind of suave exception to everything one says. Nor does Pelleas agree to distraction. He agrees to all fancies and very moderately corrects all facts, surely an attribute of the Immortals.

Then the path-for-violets took a turn, "a turn and we stood in the heart of things." And we saw that we had not been mistaken. The path had not been intended for day-folk at all; we had taken it unaware

and it had led us as was its fairy nature to something wonderful.

From where we stood the ground sloped gently downward, a tentative hill, not willing to declare itself, and spending its time on a spangle of flowers. We could see the flowers, for the high moon broke from clouds. And in the hollow stood a little building like a temple, with a lighted portico girt by white columns and, within, a depth of green and white. We looked, breathless, perfectly believing everything that we saw, since to doubt might be to lose it. Indeed, in that moment the only thing that I could not find it in my heart to fall in with was the assumption that we were in the New World at all. Surely, here was the old order, the golden age, with a temple in a glade and a satyr at your elbow. Could this be Little Rosemont, where we were to find Avis and Lawrence and Hobart Eddy and other happy realities of our uneventful lives?

"Oh, Pelleas," I said in awe, "if only we can get inside before it disappears."

"Maybe," murmured Pelleas, "if we can do that we can disappear with it."

For we have long had a dream — we are too frequently besieged by the ways of the world to call it a hope — that sometime They will come and take us, the Wind or the Day or any of the things that we love, and thus save us this dreary business of dying.

We skirted the edge of the wood, looking down the while at that place of light. Within, figures were moving, there was the faint music of strings, and now and then we heard laughter. To complete our mystification, as we were well in line with the white portals there issued from the depth of green and white a group of women, fair women in white gowns and with unbound hair — and they stepped to the grass-plot before the door and moved at the direction of one who leaned, watching, in the white portico. At that we hesitated no longer but advanced boldly across the moonlit green. And when I saw that the figure in the portico wore a frock of pink and when I saw her lift her hand in a way sweetly familiar, I began to suspect that the time was not yet come when Pelleas and I were to vanish in such bright wise. Manifestly Pelleas had come to the same conclusion, for when he reached a broad, flat rock beneath a birch he beckoned me to sit there in the shadow where we could watch these strange offices.

But the broad, flat rock proved already to be occupied. As we paused beside it there sprang to his feet a boy who at first glance I protest to have looked quite like a god, he was so tall and fair under the moon. But in spite of that he instantly caught at his cap and shuffled his feet in a fashion which no god would employ.

"Oh," said he in a voice that I liked, for all his

awkward shyness, "I was just sittin' here, watchin' 'em."

Pelleas looked at him closely.

"Are you sure," demanded Pelleas, "that you are not a shepherd who has conjured up all this, on his pipe?"

He nodded toward the hollow and the young god smiled, looking dreadfully embarrassed as a god would look, charged with being a shepherd of dreams. He had some green thing in his hand which as he stood bashfully drawing it through his fingers gave out a faint, delicious odour.

"Is that mandrake?" asked Pelleas with pleasure.

And to our utter amazement the god answered: —

"Yes, sir. Squeeze it on your eyes and you can see things a good ways off, they say."

Shepherd or god, I liked him after that. I took a bit of the mandrake from him and asked him whether he had ever tried it and what he had seen; but at this he blushed so furiously that as we moved away Pelleas hastened to set him at his ease by some crisp commonplace about the night. And there we left him, standing under the birch with his mandrake in his hand, looking down, I instantly guessed, for some one in that brightness below us in the hollow.

"Pelleas," I said, "Pelleas, without any doubt there is somebody down there whom he wants to see. I dare say the temple may not be enchanted, after all.

For that fine young fellow and his blushes — they seemed to me very human!"

"That's the reason," Pelleas said most wisely, "why there is likely to be some enchantment about. The more human you are the more wonderful things are likely to happen."

That is true enough, and it was in very human fashion that next instant the figure in pink in the portico of the temple came swiftly toward us and took me in her arms. It was Avis, all tender regret for what she fancied to be her inhospitality and as perfectly the hostess as if it were usual for her to receive her guests in a white temple. And manifestly it was usual; for when she had led us within, there on a *papier maché* rock on the edge of a *papier maché* ocean sat Hobart Eddy himself and Lawrence Knight in a dress as picturesque as Hobart's; and about them in a confusion of painted idols and crowns and robes were all the house-party at Little Rosemont and a score from the countryside.

"Upon my word," Pelleas said, "they must have let us off at Arcady at last. I always knew I'd buy a through ticket some day."

Hobart Eddy came forward, twitching an amazing shepherd's cloak about him, and shook his shepherd's crook at us.

"I'm head goat," he explained, "but they let me

call myself a goatherd because they think I won't see through the offence."

Then Avis, laughing, drew Pelleas and me away to tell us how at last her dream had come true and that the white temple was the theater which she had wanted for her guests at Little Rosemont, and that on Monday it was to be opened with some tableaux and an open-air play on the grass-plot, under the moon. And when she had shown us all the charms and wonders of the pretty place she led us away for our drive across the fields to the house.

As we emerged on the wide portico Pelleas stopped us with a gesture.

"Look," he said softly, "look there. Really, you know, it's like being somewhere else."

Between the two central pillars we could see the moon streaming full upon the tiled floor; and in the brightness a little figure was standing, sandaled and crowned and in white, a solitary portress of this sylvan lodge. She had heard our approach and she turned, a radiant little creature with bright hair along her straight gown, and drew back and dropped a quick, unmistakable courtesy!

I have seldom been more amazed than by the dipping courtesy of that crowned head. Then I saw to my further bewilderment that the salutation had been intended for me. And as I looked at her a cer-

tain familiarity in her prettiness smote me, and I knew her.

"It is Bonnie!" I said.

"O, ma'am," said Bonnie, "yes'm," and blushed and waxed still prettier. And this was Bonnie, the little maid whom I had last seen as I sat with Enid's baby under the pink crab apple-tree; and she was come to Little Rosemont, Avis told me later, because her mother lived there in charge of the cedar linen room. (So her mother cannot have been Demeter after all!) I remembered her because of her really unusual prettiness which in print gowns and white caps was hardly less notable than in this splendour of white robe and unbound hair. It was easy to see why Avis had pressed her in service for the Monday tableaux. It was easy to see that no one could be more charmingly picturesque than Bonnie. And as I looked down in her face upturned to answer some slight thing that I was saying to her, in a flash something else was clear to me. With Bonnie here in this fair guise was it not the easiest matter in the world to see who had been in the mind of that fine young fellow up yonder there, with mandrake in his hands?

It was a wild guess, if you like, but a guess not difficult to make in that place of enchantment. I protest that there are nights when one suspects one's

very gateposts of observing each other kindly across one's gate.

"Bonnie," said I, with an instant intention, "come to my room to-night, please, and help me about my unpacking. I've something to say to you."

"O, yes'm," said Bonnie, and I went away smiling at the incongruity of having a radiant creature in a diadem to brush my sad gray curls.

"I have put her in a tableau," Avis said, in the carriage, "in 'The Return of Endymion.' She is a quaint little Diana. I have never seen such hair."

On which, "Avis," I asked serenely, "who, pray, is that fine young fellow hereabout who is in love with Bonnie?"

Avis, sitting tranquil in the white light with a basket of rhinestones in her lap, looked flatteringly startled.

"Half an hour on the place, Aunt Etarre," she said, shaking her head, "and you know our one romance!"

"So does Pelleas," I claimed defensively, "or, at all events, he has actually talked with the lover."

"Pooh!" said Pelleas in that splendid disdain which, in matters of romance, he always pretends, "we were talking botany."

"That's he," said Avis, nodding. "Bonnie's sweetheart is the young under-gardener — if you can call a man a sweetheart who is as shy as Karl. He

is really Faint Heart. But I think those two little people are in love."

Then I learned how, ever since the coming of Bonnie to Little Rosemont, this big young Karl had paid her the most delicate and the most distant attention. He had brought roots of violets and laid them outside her window-ledge; and he had tossed in her blind clusters of the first lady-slippers and the first roses. But though all the household at Little Rosemont had good-naturedly done what it could to help on the affair, some way it had not prospered. And as I listened I resolved past all doubting that something must be done. For Pelleas and I are fain to go through the world seeking out people who love each other without knowing, and saying to them: "Fair Heart and Faint Heart, take each other's hands and follow us."

Still, I was obliged to be certain that Bonnie was in love as well as the young god whom we had surprised, and I meant to look in her eyes the while I named the name of this young Karl. I think that there are no eyes which I cannot read in a like circumstance and the pastime is one of the delights of my hours.

"Bonnie," said I to the little maid as she brushed my hair that night, "I've an idea that you were wishing something delightful when you stood in that great doorway to-night. Were you not?"

"O, ma'am," said little Bonnie, and I saw her face, shadowy above my own in the mirror, burn sudden crimson.

"Of course you were," said I briskly. "Bonnie," I pursued, "when I came upon you I had just seen under a birch-tree not far away a fine young fellow with a flower in his hand. Can that have been the under-gardener?"

"O, ma'am," said Bonnie, "I s'pose, if he had a flower —" and her voice trembled, and she did not meet my eyes in the mirror.

"Bonnie!" said I.

Her eyes met mine.

"I know all about it," said I boldly.

"O, ma'am," she said, and tangled the comb in my sad gray curls.

Whereupon I flattered myself that I had taken Bonnie's testimony and that I was fortified with a thousand reasons for doing my best. But it was not until the next day that I knew how, of all people, I could count on Hobart Eddy to help me to be a kind of servant of Fate.

I was in the library next morning when, every one else being frightfully enthusiastic and gone to look at the puppies, he came in and sat on an ottoman at my feet — dear Hobart Eddy, with his tired eyes and worldly-wise words and smile of utter sweetness.

"Aunt Etarre," he said, "I feel bored and miserable. Let's go out in the world, hand in hand, and do a good deed. They say it sets you on your feet. I'd like to try it."

I shook my head, smiling. Nobody does more charmingly generous things than Hobart and nobody, I suppose, poses for such a man of self.

"No, Hobart," I said, "good deeds are a self-indulgence to you."

"Everything I want to do they say will be a self-indulgence," he observed reflectively. "I dare say when I die they'll all say I let myself go at last."

"What will they say when you fall in love?" I asked idly.

"What have they said?" he parried.

"Everything," I replied truthfully.

"Just so," he answered; "you wouldn't think they would have so much ingenuity. The queer thing," he added meditatively, "is that such dull folk have the originality to get up such good gossip."

"But I mean," I said, "when you really fall in love."

"I am in love," he told me plaintively, "with seeing other people in love. I would go miles merely to look on two who are really devoted to each other. I look about for them everywhere. Do you know," he said, "speaking of being in love myself, there is a most exquisite creature in a tableau I'm in Mon-

day night. I am in love with her, but, by Jove, it being a tableau I can't say a word to tell her so. It's my confounded luck. Sometimes I think I'm in a tableau all the time and can't say any of the things I really mean."

"And who may she be?" I asked politely, being old to the meaningless enthusiasms of Hobart Eddy.

"By Jove! I didn't find out," he remembered. "Nobody knew when I asked 'em. I suppose *they* were in a tableau, too, and speechless. I forgot to ask Avis. She's a goddess, asleep on a bank. She's Diana — sandals and crown and all that. And I believe I'm to come swooning down a cloud with a gold club in my hand. Anyway —"

"Hobart Eddy," I cried, "are you Endymion?"

"But why not?" he asked with a fine show of indignation; "do you think I should be just an ordinary shepherd, with no attention paid me?"

"Hobart Eddy, Hobart Eddy," I said, "listen."

Then I told him about Bonnie and Faint Heart, young god of the gardens. And he heard me, smiling, complaisant, delighted, and at the last, when he had seen what I had in mind, properly enthusiastic.

"Bonnie is going to look beautiful Monday night, Hobart," I impressed him, "and that boy will not be there to see her — save from far off, with mandrake on his eyes! But he ought to be there to see her — and Hobart, why can you not take him to the

wings with you for the tableaux and pretend that you need him to help you? And after he has seen Bonnie in her tableau you ought to be trusted to arrange something pleasant —"

He listened, pretending to be wholly amused at my excitement. But for all that he put in a word of planning here and there that made me trust him — dear Hobart Eddy.

"By Jove!" he finally recalled plaintively, "but I'm in love with her myself, you know, confound it."

"Ah, but think," I comforted him, "how easily you can forget your loves."

The night of Monday came like a thing of cloud that had been going before the day and had become silver bright when the darkness overtook it. We walked through the park from the house — Avis and Lawrence and Pelleas and Hobart Eddy and I, across the still fields never really waked from sleep by any human voice. And when we came to the little temple the moon was so bright that it was as if we had passed into a kind of day made youthful, as we dream our days.

Pelleas and I found our seats in one of the half-circle of boxes built of sweet boughs, open to the moon and walled by leaves. There was a vacant chair or two and Avis and Lawrence and Hobart Eddy sat with us in turn while the folk gathered — guests from the near country-houses, guests who had

motored out from town, and the party from Little Rosemont. The edge of the wood was hung with lanterns, as if a shower of giant sparks were held in the green.

"How will it be, Hobart?" I asked him eagerly as he joined us.

"Be? The love story? O, he's up there," Hobart assured me, "happy as anything. I think he'll put grease paint in Endymion's eyes when he comes to make me up, he's that bereft." He dropped his voice. "He has a bunch of scarlet salvia the size of a lamp," he confided. "I think he means to fire it at us in the blessed middle of the tableau."

I am a sentimental old woman. For all through that evening of beautiful pictures and beautiful colour, I sat with my thought hovering about Bonnie and that young Faint Heart. And yet I am not ashamed of that. What better could my thought hover round than such a joy, trembling into being?

"Pelleas," I whispered, "O, Pelleas. Look at those people there, and there, and down there. They don't know what a charming secret is happening."

"Pooh!" said Pelleas, "they never do know. Besides," he added, "maybe they know one of their own."

"Maybe they do," I thought, and looked with new eyes on that watching half-circle, with moving fans and fluttering scarfs. That is the best thing about

an audience: the little happy secrets that are in the hearts.

When "The Return of Endymion" was announced I was in the pleasantest excitement. For I love these hours when Love walks unmasked before me and I am able to say: Such an one loves such an one and O, I wish them well! The music sank to a single strain that beckoned to the curtain of vines behind the portico; the lights were lowered and a ripple of expectation, or so I fancied, ran here and there. And in the same instant I heard beside me a familiar voice.

"Good setting for 'em, by Jove!" it said, and there was Hobart Eddy, dropped down between Pelleas and me.

"Hobart," I said excitedly, "Hobart Eddy! This is your tableau."

He smiled, his familiar smile of utter sweetness, and rested his chin on his hand and looked at the stage.

"No, Aunt Etarre," he said; "see."

Before the portico the curtain of vines parted to the tremble of the violins. There was the slope, flower-spangled like the slope on which we sat and across which, two nights ago, Pelleas and I had fancied ourselves to be looking on immortal things. And there on the flowers lay Diana asleep, her hair spread on the green, the crescent glittering on her

forehead, her white robe sweeping her sandaled feet. This was Bonnie, dear little maid, and it was her hour; she would never again be so beautiful before the whole world.

Even then I hardly understood until I saw him come from the wings — Endymion, in the shepherd's cloak, with the shepherd's crook in his hands. And as he went near to her and stood looking down at her, Bonnie opened her eyes and saw what I saw, that her Endymion was that young god of an under-gardener. Erect, splendid, crowned with oak leaves — it was Karl's hour, too, and he had come to her. As the rose-light went stealing across the picture, embracing the shadows, glowing in her awakened face, he opened his arms to her and caught her and held her to him. The light burned vividly and beautifully; and, all her hair rippling on his shepherd's cloak, she clung to him, before those people who sat and never guessed, under the moon. It was their hour, the hour of Bonnie and Karl, and Pelleas and I were really looking toward a place of enchantment and on immortal things.

The curtain of vines swept together in a soft thunder of applause. Who were they, every one was asking, but who were they, who had given to the tableau a quality that was less like a picture than like a dream?

"Hobart, Hobart," I said, trembling, "how did you dare?"

Hobart Eddy was smiling at the ineffectual entreaties of the audience for a repetition of the picture. In vain they begged, the curtain of vines did not lift; the music swelled to a note of finality and lights leaped up.

"He wasn't so faint-hearted," said Hobart Eddy. "To be sure, I was obliged to make him do it. But then he did it. Faint Hearts aren't like that."

"Hobart," said I raptly, "you are the fairy godmother, after all."

"Ah, well," Hobart Eddy said dissentingly, "I only did it because I wanted that minute when she opened her eyes. I'd go miles to see two who are really devoted. And I was in love with her myself, confound it! But then," he added philosophically, "if I'd been there to take her in my arms I couldn't have looked on."

In the intermission before the open-air play Pelleas gave me a certain signal that we know and love and he rose and slipped from our box of boughs. I followed him without, and stepped with him across the green to the edge of the wood. There we took our way, as we had done on the night of our coming, by the path in the trees, the path that was just wide enough for, say, two violets when they venture out to walk two by two in the safe night.

"I was afraid we might not be able to come here again," Pelleas explained, "and I thought we ought . . ." he added vaguely. But I understood for I had wanted to come no less than he.

"Pelleas," I said, as we stepped along the narrow way, "suppose it had been as we fancied? Suppose it had all been some enchanted place that would have vanished with us?"

"Every time we fail to vanish from this world," Pelleas said reflectively, "something charming happens. I suppose it is always so."

"O, always," I echoed confidently.

XIV

THE GOLDEN WEDDING

NEXT day heaven opened to us — a heaven, as does not always happen, of some one's else making. Our dear Avis Knight, fancying that Lawrence was looking rather worn, persuaded him to shift the world to other shoulders while he went off for golden apples, and he agreed to a cruise in the yacht. Whereupon, Avis begged that Pelleas and I bring Nichola and spend at Little Rosemont the month of their absence. The roses were in full bloom and Avis said prettily that she longed to think of us alone there among them. Really, to have inherited North America would have been nothing to this; for Little Rosemont is my idea of a palace and I think is by far the most beautiful of the Long Island country places.

Therefore Pelleas and I went in town to fetch various belongings and Nichola. Or I think I should say to approach Nichola, that violent and inevitable force to be reckoned with like the weather and earthquakes.

"Whatever will Nichola say?" we had been

wondering all the way on train and ferry, and "Whatever *will* Nichola say?" we put it in a kind of panic, as Pelleas turned the latch-key at our house.

We went at once to the kitchen and as we descended the stairs we heard her singing low, like a lullaby, that passionate serenade, *Com' è gentil*, from Don Pasquale. Her voice is harsh and broken and sadly alien to serenades but the tones have never lost what might have been their power of lullaby. Perhaps it is that this is never lost from any woman's voice. At all events, old Nichola reduces street-organ song, and hymn, and *aria di bravura* to this universal cradle measure.

When we appeared thus suddenly before her she looked up, but she did not cease her song. She kept her eyes on us and I saw them light, but the serenade went on and her hands continued their task above the table.

"Nichola," I said, "we are invited to a most beautiful place on Long Island to stay a month while our friends are away. We are to take you, and we must start to-morrow. The house has one hundred and forty rooms, Nichola, and you shall be my lady's maid, as you used."

"And nothing to do, Nichola, but pick roses and sing," Pelleas added, beaming.

Our old serving-woman pinched the crust about a plump new pie. On the board lay a straggling

remnant of the dough for the Guinea goat. Nichola always fashioned from the remnant of pie-crust a Guinea goat which she baked and, with a blanket of jelly, ate, beginning at the horns. Once in her native Capri there had appeared, she had told me, a man from West Africa leading a Guinea goat which she averred could count; and the incident had so impressed her that she had never since made a pie without shaping this ruminant quadruped. Whether there really ever was such a goat I do not know, but Nichola believed in it and in memoriam molded pie-crust goats by the thousand. She has even fried them as doughnuts, too; but these are not so successful for the horns puff out absurdly.

"A hundred and forty rooms, Nichola," I said, "and you shall be my lady's maid."

"Yah!" Nichola rejoined, interrupting her song rather to attend to pricking the pie crust with a fork than to reply to us; "don't look for no lady-maiding from me, mem. I'll be kep' busy countin' up the windows, me. When do we start off?" she wanted to know.

Nichola evidently believed us to be jesting. Later when she found that our extravagant proposition was the truth she pretended to have known from the first.

We were in the midst of our simple preparations, when a wonderful thing occurred to Pelleas. I was

folding my gown of heliotrope silk in its tissues, the gown with the collar of Mechlin which is now my chief finery, when Pelleas came in our room.

"Etarre," he said, "you know what day comes next week. And now we shall spend it at Little Rosemont, alone!"

I knew what he meant. Had we not previously talked of it and mourned that it was not possible to us to celebrate that day alone, as we had always dreamed that one's golden-wedding day should be spent?

"Our wedding day — our golden-wedding day," I said.

Pelleas nodded. "As if they have not all been golden," he observed simply.

There was in every fern a nod for our good fortune as on that next afternoon Pelleas and Nichola and I drove up the avenue at Little Rosemont. And at the very park entrance, though of course we did not know that at the time, a part of our adventure began when the gate was opened by that brown, smiling young under-gardener Karl, with honest man's eyes and a boy's dimples, who bowed us into the place like a good genie. As we returned his greeting we felt that he was in a manner ringing up the curtain on the spectacle but we did not forecast that he was also to play a most important part.

In the great hall all the servants were gathered to

welcome us, an ensemble of liveries and courtesies in which I distinguished only Mrs. Woods, the housekeeper, very grave, a little hoarse, and clothed on with black satin. We escaped as soon as possible, Pelleas and I not having been formed by heaven to play the important squire and his lady arriving home to bonfires and village bells and a chorus of our rent roll. But once safely in the lordly sitting room of our suite, with its canopies and a dais, and epergnes filled with orchids, I had but to look at Pelleas to feel wonderfully at home. It is a blessed thing to love some one so much that you feel at home together in any place of deserts or perils or even lordly rooms filled with orchids.

On that first evening we were destined to chance upon another blessed thing of the same quality. After our solitary dinner in the stately dining-room, Pelleas and I went wandering in the grounds, very still in the hush of June with June's little moon lying on the sky. Little Rosemont is a place of well-swept lawns, and orchards then newly freed from the spell of their bloom; it is a place of great spaces and long naves, with groves whose trees seem to have been drawn together to some secret lyre. The house is a miracle of line and from its deep verandas one sees afar off a band of the sea, as if some god had struck it from the gray east. And everywhere at that glad season were the roses, thousands and

thousands of roses — ah, fancy using figures to compute roses quite as one does in defraying debts. Though indeed as Pelleas frivolously said, "'Time brings roses' but so does money!" For many of those assembled were from Persia and Cashmere and I dare say from Lud and Phut. I think that I have never had an experience of great delight at which a band of familiar, singing things was not present; and when I remember the month at Little Rosemont it is as if the roses were the musical interludes, like a Greek chorus, explaining what is. They hang starry on almost every incident; unless perhaps on that of the night of our arrival, when we are told that Nichola in the servants' dining-hall produced a basket which she had brought with her and calmly took therefrom her Guinea goat of the day before and ate it, before all assembled, beginning at the horns!

From the driveway on that first walk Pelleas and I looked up to a balcony over which the roses were at carnival. It was the kind of balcony that belongs to a moon and I half suspect all such balconies to be moon-made and invisible by sun or starlight; it was the kind of balcony that one finds in very old books, and one is certain that if any other than a lover were to step thereon it would forthwith crumble away. Pelleas, looking up at the balcony, irrelevantly said:—

"Do you remember the young rector over there in

Inglese? The Reverend Arthur Didbin? Who married Viola to Our Telephone the other day?"

"Yes, of course, Pelleas," said I, listening. What could the Reverend Arthur Didbin have to do with this balcony of roses?

"I've been thinking," Pelleas went on, "that next week, on our golden-wedding day you know, we might have him come up here in the evening — there will be a full moon then —" he hesitated.

"Yes, yes?" I pressed him, bewildered.

"Well, and we might have him read the service for us, just we three up there on the balcony. The marriage service, Etarre — unless you think it would be too stupid and sentimental, you know?"

"Stupid!" I said, "O, Pelleas."

"Ah, well, Nichola would think we were mad," he defended his scruples.

"But she thinks so anyway," I urged, "and besides she will never know. But Mr. Didbin — what of him?" I asked doubtfully; "will he laugh or will he understand?"

Pelleas reflected.

"Ah, well," he said, "Hobart told me that one night when Mr. Didbin's train ran into an open switch he walked through six miles of mud to marry a little country couple whom he had never seen."

And that confirmed us: The Reverend Arthur Didbin would understand.

We stepped on in the pleasant light talking of this quite as if we had a claim on moon-made balconies and were the only lovers in the world. That we were not the only lovers we were soon to discover. At the edge of a grove, where a midsummer-night-dream of a fountain tinkled, we emerged on a green slope spangled with little flowers; and on its marge stood a shallow arbour formed like a shell or a petal and brave with bloom. We hastened toward it, certain that it had risen from the green to receive us, and were close upon it before we saw that it was already occupied. And there sat Bonnie, the little maid whose romance we had openly fostered, and with her that young Karl, the under-gardener, whom we observed in an instant Avis could never call Faint Heart any more.

Pelleas glanced at me merrily as we immediately turned aside pretending to be vastly absorbed in some botanical researches on the spangled evening slope.

"Bless us, Etarre," he said, smiling, "what a world it is. You cannot possibly hollow out an arbour anywhere without two lovers waiting to occupy it."

"Ah, yes," said I, "the only difficulty is that there are more lovers than arbours. Here are we for example, arbourless."

But that we did not mind. On the contrary, being meddlers where arbours and so on are concerned, we

set about finding out more of the two whom we had surprised. This was not difficult because we had brought with us Nichola; and through her we were destined to develop huge interest in the household. Nichola indeed talked of them all perpetually while she was about my small mending and dressing and she scolded shrilly at matters as she found them quite as she habitually criticizes all orders and systems. Nichola is in conversation a sad misanthrope, which is a pity, for she does not know it; and to know it is, one must suppose, the only compensation for being a misanthrope. She inveighed for example against the cook and the head laundress who had a most frightful feud of long standing, jealously nourished, though neither now had the faintest idea in what it had arisen — was this not cosmopolitan and almost human of these two? And Nichola railed at the clannishness of the haughty Scotch butler until he one day opened an entry door for her, after which she softened her carping, as is the way of the world also, and objected only to what she called his "animal brogue," for all the speeches of earth alien to the Italian are to Nichola a sign of just so much black inferiority. And she went on at a furious rate about the scandalous ways of "Reddie," the second stableman, who, she declared, "kep' the actual rats in the stable floor with their heads off their pillows, what with his playin' on a borrow' fiddle that he'd wen' to work an'

learnt of himself." Through Nichola we also had our attention directed to Mrs. Woods' groveling fear of burglars — her one claim to distinction unless one includes that she pronounced them "burgulars." And too we heard of the sinful pride of Sarah McLean of the cedar linen room who declared in the hearing of the household that one of her ancestors was a *Hittite*. Where she had acquired this historic impression we never learned nor with what she had confused the truth; but she stoutly clung to her original assertion and on one occasion openly told the housekeeper that as for her family-tree it was in the Old Testament Bible; and the housekeeper, crossing herself, told this to Nichola who listened, making the sign of the horn to ward away the evil. It was like learning the secrets of a village; but the greatest of these realities proved to be Bonnie McLean, daughter of her of Hittite descent, and Karl, the under-gardener and the genie of the gate. Picture the agitation of Pelleas and me when Nichola told us this: —

"Yes, mem," she said, "them two, they're in love *pitiful*. But the young leddy's mother, she's a widdy-leddy an' dependent on. An' as for the young fellow, he's savin' up fer to get his own mother acrost from the old country an' when he does it they're agoin' to get marrit. But he needs eighty dollars an' so far they say he's got nine. Ain't it the

shame, mem, an' the very potatoes in this house with cluster diamin's in their eyes?"

Surely Avis did not know this about the young lovers — Avis, one of whose frocks would have set the two at housekeeping with the mother from "the old country" at the head of the table. Pelleas and I were certain that she did not know, although we have found that there are charming people of colossal interests to whom one marriage more or less seems to count for as little as a homeless kitten, or a "fledgling dead," or the needless felling of an ancient oak. But it is among these things that Pelleas and I live, and we believe that in spite of all the lovers in the world there is yet not enough love to spare one lover's happiness. So while the moon swelled to the full and swung through the black gulf of each night as if it had been shaped by heaven for that night's appointment, we moved among the roses of Little Rosemont, biding our golden-wedding day, gradually becoming more and more intent upon the romance and the homely realities of that liveried household. Perhaps it was the story of Bonnie and Karl that suggested to Pelleas the next step in our adventure; or it may have been our interest in "Reddie," whom we unearthed in the stable one afternoon and who, radiant, played for us for an hour and fervently thanked us when he had concluded. At all events, as our day of days came on apace Pelleas became con-

vinced that it was infamously selfish for us to spend it in our own way. Because heaven had opened to us was that a reason for occupying heaven to the exclusion of the joys of others?

"Etarre," he said boldly, "there is not the least virtue in making those about one happy. That is mere civilization. But there is nobody about us but Avis' servants. And she told us to make ourselves at home. Let's give all the servants a holiday on that day and get on by ourselves."

"We might let them picnic in the grounds," I suggested doubtfully.

"With lemonade and cake," Pelleas submitted.

"Lemonade and cake!" I retorted with superiority; "the servants of to-day expect lobster and champagne."

"Ah, well," Pelleas defiantly maintained, "I believe they will like your cream tarts anyway." He meditated for a moment and then burst out daringly: "Etarre! Would Avis care? Of course she could never do it herself; but do you think she would care if we let them all come up that night and dance in the great hall?"

I stared at Pelleas aghast.

"But they wouldn't like it, Pelleas!" I cried; "servants, in this day, are different. That butler now — O, Pelleas, he'd never do it."

"Indeed he would," Pelleas returned confidently;

"he's a fine Scot with a very decent bagpipe in his clothes closet. I've seen it. I'll get him to bring it!" Pelleas declared with assurance.

"But why—" I quavered momentarily; "and why not?" I instantly went on; "the very thing!" I ended, as triumphantly as if I had thought the matter out quite for myself. "And, if you like, Pelleas, I'll oversee the making of the cream tarts for the whole company!" I added, not to be outdone.

It is amazing what pleasant incredulities become perfectly possible when once you attack them as Nichola attacks her Guinea goats, beginning at the horns.

So that was why, having broached the subject to those concerned as delicately as if we had been providing entertainment for a minister of state; having been met with the enthusiasm which such a minister might exhibit as diplomacy; and having myself contributed to the event by the preparation of a mountain of my *chef d'œuvre*, the frozen cream tarts which Pelleas appears to think would be fitting for both thrones and ministers assembled, he and I stood together at half after eight on the evening of our golden-wedding day and, in the middle of our lordly sitting room, looked at each other with tardy trembling. Now that the occasion was full upon us it seemed a Titanic undertaking. I was certain that far from being delighted the servants were

alarmed and derisive and wary of our advances; that "Reddie" would at the last moment refuse to play upon his borrowed fiddle for the dancing; and that the haughty Scotch butler would be bored to extinction.

"O, Pelleas!" I said miserably, as we went down the grand staircase, "it's a terrible business, this attempt at philanthropy among the servants in high places."

"At all events," said Pelleas brightly, "we are not plotting to improve them. Though of course if that is done in the right way —" he added, not to be thought light-minded. Pelleas has an adorable habit of saying the most rebellious things, but it is simply because he is of opinion that a great deal of nonsense is talked by those who have not the brains to rebel.

On a sudden impulse he drew me aside to the latticed window of the landing and pushed it ajar. The moon rode high above the oaks; it was as if the night stood aside in delighted silence in this exalted moment of the moon's full. Around the casement the roses gathered, so that the air was sweet.

"Ah, well," Pelleas said softly, "I dare say they'll like it. They must — 'in such a night.' We'll leave them to themselves in a little while. The Reverend Arthur Didbin will be here at ten, remember."

The great honey-tongued clock beside us touched the silence with the half hour.

"Pelleas," I whispered him, "O, Pelleas. It was fifty years ago this very minute. We were saying, 'I will' and 'I will.'"

"Well," said Pelleas, "we have, dear. Though we may yet fall out on a question of Angora cats and the proper way to lay an open fire."

We smiled, but we understood. And we lingered for a moment in silence. Let me say to all skeptics that it is worth being married an hundred years to attain such a moment as that.

Then as we went down the stairs the dining-room door suddenly burst open with an amazing, eerie clamour; and into the great oak-paneled hall marched the haughty Scotch butler in full Highland costume, plaid and bare knees and feather, playing on his bagpipe like mad. No peril, then, of his being bored to extinction, nor the others, as we were soon to find. For the bagpipe gave the signal and immediately came pouring from below stairs the great procession of our guests. My old head grows quite giddy as I try to recount them. There were Mrs. Woods, very grave, a little hoarse, and clothed on with black satin; and the mother of Bonnie in brown silk and a cameo pin, as became a daughter of the Hittites; and Bonnie herself of exquisite prettiness in white muslin and rosebuds; and Karl in his

well-brushed black; and "Reddie," his face shining above a flaming cravat; and the cook and the head laundress who had entered competitive toilettes like any gentlewomen; and the other menservants in decent apparel; and a bevy of *chic* maids in crisp finery and very high heels. Led by Mrs. Woods they came streaming toward us and shook our hands — was ever such a picture anywhere, I wondered, as I saw them moving between the priceless tapestries and clustering about the vast marble fireplace that came from the quarries of Africa. And to our unbounded gratification they seemed immensely to like it all and not to have lost their respect for us because we were civil to them. Then when, presently, we had sent "Reddie" and his fiddle up to the pillared musicians' gallery, they all rose to his first strains and in an instant the Scotch butler had led out the crispest and highest-heeled of the maids and they all danced away with a will. Danced very well too. It is amazing how tricks of deportment are communicable from class to class. If I were to offer to solve the servant problem I conclude that I would suggest to all employers: Be gentlemen and gentlewomen yourselves and live with all dignity and daintiness. Though I dare say that I am a very impractical old woman, but all the virtue in the world does not lie in practicality either.

In a little time Pelleas slipped away to brew a

steaming punch — a harmless steaming punch made from a recipe which my mother, who was a high church woman, always compounded for dining archbishops and the like. Bonnie and Karl did not dance but sat upon an old stone window seat brought from Thebes and watched with happy eyes. And when the punch came in we wheeled it before them and they served every one.

In that lull in the dancing I looked about with sudden misgiving; Nichola was not with us. Where was Nichola, that faithful old woman, and why was she not at our party? She had left me in full season to make ready.

"Where is Nichola?" I anxiously demanded of Pelleas, reproaching myself for my neglect.

Pelleas did not immediately answer and when I looked up I fancied that I detected his eyes twinkling. But before I could wonder or inquire came that which it makes my heart beat now to remember. Without the slightest warning there sounded and echoed a violent summons on the great entrance doors. Nothing could have created more consternation than did the innocent fall of that silver knocker at Little Rosemont.

I chanced to be sitting near the door and I think that I must have risen in astonishment. I saw Pelleas whirl in concern, and I was conscious of the instant lull in the animated talk. Then the

Scotch butler recovered himself and in full Highland costume, with bare knees, he sprang to his post quite as if this had been at the head of a mountain pass and threw wide the door.

"Upon my word!" I heard exclaiming a fine, magnetic voice, "upon my word, a party. Let us blush and withdraw."

But they came crowding to the door; and there in motor caps and coats stood a gay company of our friends and the friends of Avis, and of them Madame Sally Chartres and Wilfred; and Lisa and her uncle, Dudley Manners, who were guests near by at Chynmere Hall; and Hobart Eddy, whose was the voice that I had heard. They had motored out from town and from places roundabout us and were come to pay us a visit.

"Sally!" said I feebly. Sally was with Hobart Eddy who adores her and, his critics say, affects her so-picturesque company to add to his so-popular eccentricities. And with them came a cloud of the mighty, a most impressive cloud of witnessing railway presidents and bankers and statesmen and the like; and all spectators at our party.

"Ah, Etarre!" Sally cried blithely, "this is charming. But — we are not invited."

"No one is invited," said I faintly, "we all belong here. Ah," I cried, as the humour of it overcame me, "come in. Do come in. The punch is just served."

They needed no second bidding. In they all marched in the merriest of humours, not in the least understanding the meaning of that strange assembly but with sufficient of moon magic and the swift motion in their dancing blood to be ready for everything. And while Pelleas led them away to the billiard room to put aside their wraps, I found Hobart Eddy beside me. And somehow, before I knew, I was telling him all about the occasion and at his beseeching actually leading him from one to another and soberly presenting him to Mrs. Woods and the daughter of the Hittites and the cook. Only to see that elegant young leader of cotillons bowing before the head laundress in her competitive toilette was something to remember.

"And *voilà mes enfants*, the sweethearts," he murmured as we halted near the window seat from Thebes. There sat Bonnie and Karl, intent upon each other, she with a flush on her face that matched the rosebuds of her frock. And how it happened I hardly know, save that I was at that moment a distracted old woman and that in matters of romance I invariably lose my head; but I instantly went a little mad and told Hobart Eddy all about that young Endymion and his Diana of the tableaux: how Endymion's old mother must be spirited from "the old country" before they might be married; and even how eighty dollars was necessary and how they had only nine. I had just

paused breathless when the others came trooping from the den, and Sally Chartres in white cloth and white curls leaned upon the arm of Mr. Dudley Manners — he is king of some vast part of the mineral or vegetable kingdom at the moment though they modestly call it only a corner — and insisted on meeting every one, on hearing the bagpipe, on listening to "Reddie" play, and on being a good angel with a cloud of the mighty at her side.

In the midst of this bewildering business the dining-room doors opened and in came the tall and smiling footmen whose part was to bring up the supper of cold dainties. And even in that moment my heart thrilled with thanksgiving and pride in the contemplation of the one tall footman who bore the tray of those cream tarts of mine. I say it boldly, and Pelleas said it first: there never was such a decoction of thick, frozen cream and foamy chocolate in this world of delectables. I could not veil my satisfaction as I saw these set upon the table where the plates were piled, and of a truth they looked so delicious that for an instant it seemed to me the most natural thing in the world that Hobart Eddy should leap from his place at my side as if he had gone suddenly mad at the sight.

"Wait, please!" he cried ringingly, "no one must touch anything yet!"

On which he sprang up the step that leads to the

great yellow salon, lighted to enhance the look of festivity, and thus stood directly back of the supper table. He was very handsome, his face alight and glowing, his erect, compact figure drawn to its full height. And before I could even guess what he was about, what had he done, this idol of society, this deviser of the eccentric, but make his friends know in a burst of amazing eloquence all that I had just told him of the love story of Bonnie and Karl, save their very names.

His friends listened, curious, ready to be amused, and at the last genuinely diverted; and the household of Little Rosemont listened, bewildered, not knowing what to expect; and as for Bonnie and Karl and Pelleas and me, we four listened and doubted the evidence of our own senses, until: —

"Therefore," cried Hobart Eddy, "I offer at auction a portion of the contents of this table, especially one fourth of this tray of amazing tarts, as an all-star benefit for these two young people. Also, I offer a limited number of glasses of yonder punch — hey, Mannie!" he called warningly to Mr. Dudley Manners, who stood with a punch glass in his hand; "drop it down, man!"

"I'm hanged if I do," said Mr. Manners, merrily; "I'll bid five for it first, you know!"

"Done!" cried Hobart Eddy, rapping on the table, "and what am I bid for this first appetizing

and innocent confection, this tart, all compact of cream and spices —" So he went on, and I clung to my chair and expected the whole place to crumble away and Nichola to call me to breakfast in New York. It was too wonderful.

But it was all true. They were caught in the spirit of the happy hour as if this had been some new game contrived to tempt their flagging interests. They gathered about the table, they bid one another down, they prompted the auctioneer, they escaped to corners with cream tarts — my cream tarts! — for which they had paid a price that made me tremble. And as for our original guests, they were lined up at a respectful distance, but quite frantic with the excitement, for they were all devoted — as who would not have been? — to the two to whom this would mean all happiness. And as for Bonnie and Karl, scarce able to breathe they sat on the stone bench from Thebes and clung to each other's hands. Ah, there never was such an hour. It makes me young to think of it.

So it went on until the last tart of the portion which he had reserved was auctioned to the highest bidder. And hardly had Hobart Eddy invited the others to the table and paused for breath when the question that had been forced from my mind by the unexpected arrivals was answered: Nichola appeared in the dining-room door.

She had made herself splendid in her best frock, a flaming scarlet merino; for Nichola has never lost her Italian love of colour. On her head she had a marvelous cap of the kind that she can fashion at a moment's notice from a linen pillow case and a bit of string. And she too bore a tray, a tray of that which had detained her below stairs fashioning it for a surprise, a tray, in short, heaped with tiers and tiers of pie-crust Guinea goats.

On these Hobart Eddy seized with an ardour that was beautiful to see. Nichola, frowning terribly, stood back half minded to break into shrill upbraidings. And while I was trying between my tears and smiles to make her know what it was all about, her whole herd of goats was sold off at a price which she afterward told me, privately, was as high as the Pope in the Vatican could expect for his pie crusts.

They swept the pile of crisp notes and shining coin into a hat and thrust it in the hands of Nichola, who stood nearest; and that old woman at their bidding crossed the slippery oaken floor and poured the treasure in the lap of little Bonnie, while the daughter of the Hittites sobbed on the first shoulder, which chanced to be that of her ancient enemy, the housekeeper.

Nichola's presentation speech was brief and to the point.

"Here," she said, "get marrit."

Bonnie, dear little maid in muslin and rosebuds, stood up with Karl, both pink and white to see; and they bowed, and laughed through their tears. Ah, there were tears in the eyes of others of us too as we looked; and Madame Sally Chartres and a very gay and magnificent Mrs. Dane-Orvil and the cook formed one group and impartially smiled at one another. Some way, a mask had fallen.

With Nichola's words still in our ears the clock chimed quarter after ten, and in the moonlight of the open door appeared on a sudden the eager, concerned face of the Reverend Arthur Didbin, come to keep his appointment with Pelleas and me.

At sight of him Pelleas fairly beamed.

"Why not?" he cried out; "what do these two young people say? Why shall they not be married *now?*"

Why not, indeed? The proposition was met with acclamation. They hardly waited for the frightened, ecstatic nod of star-eyed little Bonnie before they had the supper table pushed aside — indeed, I do not remember now whether it was the railway president and Mr. Dudley Manners who did most of the work or the Scotch butler and the footmen, for they all helped together. And Bonnie and Karl stood up in the door of the salon, and so did the daughter of the Hittites, and Hobart Eddy insisted

on being joint best man with the Scotch butler, and the Reverend Arthur Didbin married the two young lovers then and there. I have always held that the license demanded in some parts is unromantic nonsense.

After that there was a blur of adieux, and Hobart Eddy kissed my hand and even when his machine had been started came running back in the moonlight to get from Karl the address of his mother "in the old country" so that he might cable to her and have her rejoicing by next morning. No, never tell me that any man is mere idler and dilettante, for I have seen the heart of one such and hereafter I dare not disbelieve in any one.

They all swept down the moonlit drive, hands waving, motor horns sounding; and the haughty Scotch butler in full Highland costume stood between two pillars and played his bagpipe to speed them on their way. The door of the tonneau of the last motor had just been hospitably opened with the offer to set down the Reverend Arthur Didbin in the village when that gentleman, his gray hair blowing, hurried to where Pelleas and I were standing.

"But," he said anxiously, "did you not wish me for something? Did you not wish —"

At that Pelleas and I looked away from each other in sudden consternation and then with one accord smiled and shook our heads. With our assurance

he turned away and in silence we watched him down the drive. And after the last motor had disappeared behind the shrubbery Pelleas and I lingered alone in the moonlit portal breathing in the roses, and still we did not meet each other's eyes. But when there was at last no excuse for our waiting there longer I looked up at him shamefacedly enough.

"Pelleas," I faced the truth, but solemnly lest he should imagine that I was not filled with regret at our neglect, "Pelleas, we *forgot* our golden wedding."

"But there has been a golden wedding all the same," said Pelleas.

However, in fear of what the balcony of roses would think of our defection, we stepped out there for a moment on our way upstairs. And there Pelleas said over something that is a kind of bridal song for a Golden Wedding: —

> "My own, confirm me! If I tread
> This path back, is it not in pride
> To think how little I dreamed it led
> To an age so blessed that by its side
> Youth seems the waste instead!"

We do not think that the balcony itself can have agreed with this, because it was a moon balcony, made for youthful lovers. But roses are like a chorus, explaining what is; and no one can persuade us that these failed to understand.

XV

THE WEDDING

TOWARD the end of July we found that the lodge at Little Rosemont was to be vacant for a month or two and Pelleas rented it, furnished, from the agent; and we took Nichola and moved down the length of the gravel to the littlest house in the world, set in the littlest garden. There we were established three days and more before Avis and Lawrence were expected home.

We had merely crossed the garden from the great house, and yet life in the little house seemed another matter, as if a harp were heard in a room instead of in an open field. We felt less professionally alive and more free to live. It was as if, Pelleas said, we were reading a poem rather for the exquisite meaning than for the exquisite rhythm.

There was another reason why the lodge invited us. Though it was nearly August, its tiny garden, walled round with a half-moon of hedge, was rich with roses as if, Pelleas said, for an after-meeting of certain Junes. For the lodge garden had been set with monthly roses, those prodigals of giving, and

there Chinese roses, Bengal roses, Giant of Battles and Cloth of Gold rioted about a Hundred-leaved rose from the Caucasus and that week they were all ripe with bloom.

That first morning as we stepped on the porch was a kind of greeting, as intimate and personal as a nod. Pelleas and I stood in the garden with the sun, as I believe, slanting madly in every direction and butterflies vanishing against the blue. At all events, that is as I soberly recall the day; and yet it is the day which we remember as our one offence against love. It was the one time in our life that we said of two lovers in whom we believed: "Are we sure that they are right?" instead of our usual: "Let them be married to-day!" I can hardly credit my own feint at heartlessness.

We went across the strip of terrace with a pleasure that was like the pleasure of beginnings. In the center of the garden was a little pool for water flowers and there we set the fountain free in the sheer delight of bringing about all the liberty possible; and we watched the scarlet tanagers bathing in the trickling outlet beside the Hundred-leaved rose. And so we came at last to the arbour in a green corner of the wall, and in its doorway we stood still with the reasonable impression that we were thinking what we seemed to see.

On a bench beneath a window where the roses

made an oval open to the garden sat a girl. At first, save the shining of her hair, I saw only that she had beside her a little traveling bag and, also beside her, a fine, manly boy of not a day more than twenty-two. She was crying a little and he was attempting with adorable awkwardness to comfort her. At first glance the most rational explanation was that they were run-away sprites from some neighbouring goblin settlement, and Pelleas and I were making a sympathetic effort to withdraw when they looked up and saw us.

Lo, with a little traveling bag between them, there were Lisa and Eric.

Almost before I grasped the import of this I hurried forward and took Lisa in my arms. In all possible affairs I firmly believe that the kiss should come first and the explanation afterward.

"But it is Lisa!" I cried. "Pelleas, it is Lisa and Eric. Wherever have you come from, dear heart?"

The story was out in one burst of courage with the tears so near, so near.

"I came from Chynmere," she said; "Uncle Dudley and I are still at the Wortleys', you know — that is, Uncle Dudley is there. I — I ran away from the Hall this m-morning. I — I eloped. I — Eric — we are going to be —"

Of course the rest was luminously clear.

"Dear heart," I cried, "then what in this world are you crying for?"

Crying. In the midst of one's elopement on a glad morning with the sun slanting in every direction and butterflies vanishing against the blue.

"At all events," said young Eric Chartres, with the most charmingly abashed smile, "*I'm* not crying."

Bit by bit this logical climax of the Summer's situation was imparted to us — indeed, Pelleas and I had already secretly prophesied it. For Dudley Manners to have charge of little Lisa at all was sufficiently absurd; but for him with his middle-aged worldliness to have in keeping her love story was not to be borne. Lisa and Eric had been betrothed since Spring and in those two months Dudley Manners' objection on the score of their youth had not been to any extent outgrown. Moreover, Lisa explained tremulously, Uncle Dudley had lately given out that she had not yet "seen the world." Therefore he had taken passage for her and a Miss Constance Wortley, a governess cousin at Chynmere Hall — elderly and an authority on plant life in Alaska — and they were to go abroad to see the world for two years; and Eric was of course to be left behind.

"*Two years*," Lisa said impressively, with the usual accent of two eternities; "we were to go to the north of Africa to watch the musk roses bloom and

to the Mediterranean to look for rosemary. Uncle Dudley thinks *that* would be seeing the world. So Eric came this morning early and I slipped down and met him before any one was up. And we came here. I told Eric," Lisa confessed, "what you told me about Cornelia Emmeline Ayres' elopement. And we *knew* you would both understand."

Pelleas and I looked at each other swiftly. Nature is very just.

"But what are you crying for, dear?" I puzzled then; "you are never sorry you came?"

"Ah, but," said Lisa sadly, "I think that Miss Wortley really wants to go to Europe and wait about for things to bloom. And now of course she can't. And then they say—Uncle Dudley says—that I can't make Eric happy until I know something of life."

"My dear," said I from the superiority of my seventy years, "I don't know about the rest. But that much I am positive is nonsense."

"Isn't loving somebody knowing all about life?" Lisa asked simply.

"It is," Pelleas and I answered together.

"Ah," Lisa cried, brightening, "I *said* you would understand. Didn't I, Eric?"

Eric raptly assented. I had always liked the boy. His whole mind was on Lisa and yet, though from the edges of his consciousness, he had an exquisite manner.

"At all events," said I when presently I left Lisa in the flowered chintz guest room, "let us lunch first and be married afterward. Whatever happens you must have one of Nichola's salads."

I hurried downstairs longing to find Pelleas and to plan with him how we were to bring it all about; but Pelleas was still in conference with that young lover and they were walking up and down the path, heads bent, brows grave, as if the matter were actually one requiring the weightiest consideration. I stood for a moment at the hall window to watch them, with all my heart longing to cry out: Never mind the reasons. Look at the roses. It is perfectly easy to see what *they* think.

Instead I went to the kitchen to say a word about luncheon. And the day was so sunny and the guests at luncheon were so to my liking and my heart was so full of their story that, as well as for a more practical reason, I was obliged to tell something of it to Nichola.

Nichola was washing green leaves, and these, tender and curled in her withered hands, were as incongruous as a flush I had once detected on her withered cheek. In her starched print gown Nichola looked that morning like some one cut from stiff paper.

"Nichola," said I, "I *think* we may have a wedding here this afternoon."

Instantly her little deep-set eyes became quick-lidded with disapproval.

"It is by no means certain," I pursued, "but we hope to have it here. And," I advanced delicately, "could you possibly have ready for us something frozen and delicious, Nichola? With little cakes? Then you need make no dessert at all for dinner."

Nichola looked at me doubtfully, pulling down her brown print sleeves over her brown wrists.

"*Che!*" said she, "if it is a runaway match I cannot do this."

I looked at Nichola in amazement. I was used to her denials; these were merely the form that her emotion took. I was used to her prejudices; these were her only pastime. But I had never before heard her offer an objection which seemed to have a reason.

"Why not — but why not, Nichola?" I cried.

"I had a sister," Nichola explained unexpectedly; and in all these forty years and more I had never before heard her sister's name upon her lips. "She went quietly, quietly to San Rafael an' a priest married her to Beppo an' they came home for supper. But no good came. Beppo was drown' from his boat within the year an' with him a net full of fine fish. If it is a runaway match I cannot do this. No good will come."

"But, Nichola," I urged reasonably, "you would

not be blamed. Though to be sure I may ask you to telephone to Mr. Didbin, that young rector at Inglese. But you would not be blamed. And to make cream sherbet, that would be no part of the ceremony. And little cakes —"

"No good will come!" cried Nichola shrilly; "for the love of heaven, have I not said how Beppo was drown' with all his fish? It is not holy."

"Nichola," I asked with dignity, "will you be sure to have a particularly delicious luncheon to-day? And will you make for dessert to-night a sherbet, with little cakes, and have it ready in the afternoon?"

I went away with a false majesty covering my certainty that Nichola would pay not the slightest heed to my injunction. Nichola is in everything a frightful nonconformist, from habit; if to this were really superadded a reason I could not tell what might happen, but I felt sadly sure that Lisa and Eric would have for their wedding feast afternoon tea and nothing more.

"Nichola!" said I from the doorway, "what made you think that they had run away?"

"*Che!*" said Nichola grimly, "I saw them come in the gate. Have I lived these seventy years always, always with my two eyes shut?"

As I hurried away I marveled at that. Once Nichola had unexpectedly proved to me that she has wishes and even dreams. Was it possible that

she knew a lover when she saw one? After all, that is a rare gift.

At the foot of the stairs Pelleas met me with a manner of nothing but gravity.

"Pelleas!" I cried, "isn't it delightful? Wasn't it providential that they came to us?"

"Etarre," said Pelleas solemnly, "I'm not at all sure that we oughtn't to send them straight back to Chynmere Hall."

If Pelleas had proposed persuading Lisa and Eric to forget each other I could have been no more amazed. Pelleas, who always pretends enormous unconcern in all romance and secretly works with all his might on the side of the adventure, Pelleas, to speak in austere fashion of sending two lovers home. What did he mean? And did he think that a course in the flora of Europe would make anybody any happier whatever?

"Pelleas," I cried, "how can you? When *we* are so happy?"

"But you know we didn't elope," Pelleas argued.

"Wouldn't you have loved me if we had?" I inquired reasonably.

"Of course I would," cried Pelleas, "but —"

"Ah, well, then," I finished triumphantly, "it's the same way with them."

I recall a distinct impression that I had the better of the argument.

"But you see," Pelleas persisted gently, "after all they are so appallingly young, Etarre. And if Dudley Manners were to be angry and if he were to disinherit Lisa, and so on —"

"As for things going wrong," said I, "can anything be so wrong as for two who love each other to be separated?"

"No," Pelleas admitted justly, "nothing can be. All the same —"

"Pelleas!" I cried in despair, "we could have that young rector over here, and they could be married in the little round drawing-room — or in the rose arbour — or in the garden at large. Think of it — cream sherbet and little cakes afterward and us for parents and wedding party and all. Then you and I could go straight to Dudley Manners at Chynmere and tell him how it was, and I *know* he would forgive them. Pelleas! Can you really think of that dear child spending two years with an authority on plant life in Alaska?"

"Instead of going to him afterward," said Pelleas boldly then, "suppose you and I leave here after luncheon and drive to Chynmere and *make* Dudley Manners consent? And bring him and Miss Constance Wortley back to the wedding!" he finished with triumphant daring.

"And not be married secretly?" I said lingeringly, as if the secret wedding were our own.

"Ah, well," said Pelleas, "at all events we won't tell him on any account where they are."

So it was settled, and when presently we four went out to our tiny dining-room courage and gayety were in the air. Our dining-room was white and dull blue with a wreath of roses outside every window and a bowl of roses on the table. And if Nichola considered it reprehensible to assist at a "runaway match" she manifestly had no such scruple about the luncheon to precede it for she set before us the daintiest dishes. I could see the while how her little, quick-lidded eyes were fixed disapprovingly on the young lovers; but then Nichola's eyes disapprove of the very moon in the sky. I wondered, as I looked at Lisa in the noon of her fresh young beauty, and at Eric, so adoringly in love, how Nichola could even pretend to disapproval at sight of them; and if she had been any one but Nichola I would have suspected her conversion, for of her own will she served our coffee in the rose arbour. Whereupon Pelleas and I became absorbingly interested in the progress of some slips which had been in the ground about six hours and we wandered away to look at them, cups in hand, and left those two to take their coffee in the arbour — in memory of a certain day when we had been left to drink our coffee alone. And when we came back we scrupulously refrained

from looking whether they had so much as sipped a thimbleful.

Then, feeling deliciously guilty, we announced to our guests that we had an errand which would keep us away for an hour. And that if it should seem best there would be ample time for the wedding on our return. And that at all events they must decide whether they would be married in the round drawing-room, or in the rose arbour, or in the garden at large. Also, not knowing what warning or summons we might wish hurriedly to send, I added to Lisa: —

"And if the telephone rings, dear, you would better answer it yourself. For it may be Cupid and ministers of grace. No one can tell."

"O, Aunt Etarre," said Lisa prettily, "this is perfect of you. Isn't it, Eric?"

The way that Eric shook the hand of Pelleas three times on the way to the gate might have indicated to some that he thought it was.

Yet there we were, hastening out in the world to find a possible obstacle to all that innocent joy. Never before had we been guilty of such disaffection or even of prudence in such a cause.

"Pelleas, O Pelleas," I said as we hurried down the lane for a carriage, "but suppose it doesn't turn out as we think? Suppose Dudley Manners is furious, suppose he guesses where they are and suppose —?"

"Pooh," said Pelleas in splendid disdain. "Dudley Manners. Thirty years ago I took a polo championship away from him when he was looking directly at me."

And it needed no more than this and the sun in the lane to reassure me.

From a warlike-looking farmer, a friend of ours living at the lane's end, we got a low phaeton and a tall horse which we had made occasion to use before. The drive to Chynmere occupied hardly half an hour, and when we saw the tower of the Hall above the chestnuts and before us the high English wall of the park cutting the roadside sward we looked at each other in sudden breathless abashment. After all, Lisa was Dudley Manners' ward, not ours. After all, two years in Europe are commonly accepted as desirable for a girl of twenty. In that black hour as we drew rein at the lordly entrance of Chynmere Hall itself I felt myself obliged to call up the essential horror of the situation.

"Pelleas," I said, "remember: they love each other as much as ever we did. And remember: two years with an authority on plant life in Alaska."

"Monstrous," said Pelleas firmly.

On which we went bravely up the steps.

Our enterprise was doomed to receive a blow, crushing and apparently mortal. Neither Mr. Dudley Manners nor Miss Constance Wortley was

at home. They had gone away in different directions, the man thought, immediately after luncheon.

We went back tremblingly to the low phaeton and the tall horse.

"O, Pelleas," I said in despair. "And whatever shall we do now? Those poor little people."

Pelleas looked at his watch.

"We can take an hour," he said. "We'll give Dudley Manners or the botanical lady an hour to get back, and we'll call again."

"O, Pelleas," I said, "and if they aren't there then let us go home and be married anyway —" quite as if the wedding were our own.

But Pelleas shook his head.

"Dear," he said, "we mustn't, you know. We really mustn't. It wouldn't do in the very least."

"Pelleas," said I irrelevantly, "we were just their age when we were married."

"So we were," said Pelleas, and drew the tall horse to a walk in the sun of the long green road, and we fell to remembering.

Any one who has ever by any chance remembered knows how sweet the pastime may be. Sometimes I think that heaven must be a place where some of the things that have been will be again. No wonder that as we drove on our delayed mission for those two who sat expectant and adoring in our rose garden,

a throng of phantoms of delight came about us and held us very near. No wonder that the tall horse, obeying his own will, took this road and that road, leading us farther and farther in those fragrant ways until at last where the highway ran through a little hollow at the foot of a forbidding hill he stopped altogether, minded to take the tops of some tender green, cool in the shade. I recall the ditches of yellow sweet clover and the drone of the honeybees.

The hollow was on the edge of Chynmere village. Across the green we saw the parish church, white in its elms and alders. I noted absently that a smart trap and a satin horse waited outside the iron fence and that several figures were emerging from the chapel door where the white-haired rector lingered.

"We can ask those people," suggested Pelleas, "for the shortest cut back to the Hall. I'm afraid the time is getting on."

He gathered up the lines and drove leisurely across the springing turf. A song sparrow was pouring out its little heart from the marsh land beyond the church and the sounds of the afternoon were growing every moment more beloved. Everything was luring to delight, and here were Pelleas and I alone of all the world — save Dudley Manners and this Miss Wortley — seeking to postpone a great happiness.

"Dudley Manners," said I out of the fullness of

my heart, "must be a kind of ogre. And as for this Miss Wortley, I dare say she is a regular Nichola."

At this Pelleas said something so softly that I did not hear and drew rein beside the smart trap in which a man and a woman coming from the church had just taken their places. And when I looked up I saw the man turning toward us a face so smiling and so deliciously abashed that it bewildered my recognition, until —

"Dudley Manners!" cried Pelleas. "The very man I am searching the county for."

And to this Dudley Manners said: —

"I say, Pelleas — you're a bit late — but how in the world did you guess?"

"Guess?" said Pelleas, puzzled. "Guess you?"

"Guess where — I should say guess what. Did you know I telephoned?" said Dudley Manners all at once; and then having leaped from the trap and bent above my hand he turned to the lady who had sat beside him, an exquisite elderly woman with a lapful of fresia. "This is Mrs. Manners," he said with charming pride. "The fact is, we've just been married in the chapel there."

At this my heart leaped to a thousand tunes all carrying one happy air.

"You see," he was explaining, looking up at us with an eagerness almost boyish in his transfigured face, "we — we decided rather suddenly. And we

telephoned over to you an hour ago to get you to come and stand by us —"

"Telephoned to us — at the lodge?" I cried in dismay. "O, *who* came to the telephone?"

Dudley Manners looked as if he wondered what *that* had to do with his happiness.

"I really don't know," he said. "The voice was familiar. I thought at first it might have been you, Etarre. And then they cut us off; and then a terrible voice thundered that neither of you was there. How did you know what we wanted?" he went back to his text.

But as for me I could think only of the terror of those poor little people, and I could guess that Nichola must some way have come to the rescue. I knew her voice over the telephone, like all three voices of Cerberus, saying, "Not at home."

"Dudley," said I faintly, "Pelleas — tell him. Ask him."

I gave Dudley Manners my hand and got to the ground, trembling, and crossed to the trap where the lady was so tranquilly seated, with the fresia in her lap. I said insane, unremembered vagaries to her, all the time listening to that murmur beside the phaeton and knowing that the fate of our little lovers was being decided then and there. And suddenly it came to me that the face in which I was looking was uncommonly sweet and kindly and that inasmuch

as she was Mrs. Manners and a bride I might give her my confidence and win her heart for my hope. But when I turned boldly to tell her something of the charming case she was holding out to me some sprays of her fresia.

"Won't you have this?" she said. "It is a very rare species."

And then I knew her and I marveled that I had not understood at once. This — this would be no other than Miss Constance Wortley, the botanical lady herself. And in the same instant to quicken my assurance Dudley Manners, laughing deliciously, called softly to her: —

"Constance — Constance. It's all right. Lisa and Eric are bound to be married to-day and I fancy you'll have to take me to Europe alone!"

Ah, such a moment of tender, abashed laughter and open rejoicing. And of course Pelleas and I opened our hearts and told them where the lovers were, and who had doubtless answered the telephone at the lodge. And forthwith we invited them to drive with us to the wedding, and to have tea in the garden. And so it was settled, and away we went down the golden road dipping between deep, deep green, and boldly past the tower of Chynmere Hall and through the gracious land of afternoon back to Little Rosemont lodge, bearing the glad tidings to usher in the glad event. Tea or

cream sherbet, what a world this is always turning out to be.

"We will go in and explain," I cried — how I love to explain when best things are true — "and then, Pelleas, you must hurry over in the phaeton for Mr. Didbin, and bring him back with you, no matter what. And then we will be married — in the drawing-room or the rose arbour or the garden at large."

I love to recall the pleasure of that alighting at the lodge gates, of going within, of looking across the roses for the two whom we were to surprise. I caught a flutter of white in the arbour and, palpitating, I led the way past the pool and the fountain and the trickling outlet where a scarlet wing flashed into flight and past the Hundred-leaved rose, to the turn in the path that led to the arbour.

Then without warning, outside the arbour entrance there seemed to rise from the gravel the amazing figure of Nichola — Nichola in her best black gown and embroidered white apron and an unmistakable manner of threatening us with folded arms. She stood squarely before us, looking at Pelleas and me with all the disapproval of those little, deep-set, quick-lidded eyes.

"Now, then," she said grimly, "go back. *The weddin's on.*"

In the same instant, through the low-arched doorway of the arbour, I saw Lisa and Eric and the ques-

tioning, distressed face of the Reverend Arthur Didbin.

Nichola followed my glance.

"It's none o' his doin'," she explained shrilly. "It's my doin'. We knew who was on the telephone, well enough. She answered it herself," she explained, with a jerk of her shoulders toward the arbour, "an' near fainted in my arms. She knew him. An' we knew what was like to happen when he got here. I went quickly, quickly for the minister an' here he is. You must not interfere. It is not holy!"

Nichola, that grim old woman, as the ally and not the adversary of Love! But I had no time to marvel at the death of either prejudice or reason.

"Nichola — but Nichola!" I cried breathlessly, "we haven't come to interfere. We don't want to interfere. We were going to send for Mr. Didbin ourselves."

At that Nichola drew back, but doubtfully, with mutterings. And she did not disappear until little Lisa, having seen the radiant faces of *our* bride and groom, suddenly understood and ran to them. And as for Dudley Manners, one would have said that his dearest wish had been to see Lisa married to Eric Chartres; and as for Mrs. Manners, with her kind eyes, all her fresia scattered in the path as she kissed Lisa, I think that she cannot even have no-

ticed our Hundred-leaved rose or cared whether it had come to us from its native Caucasus or her own Alaska.

I protest that I cannot now remember whether Lisa and Eric were married by the fountain or in the rose arbour or in the garden at large. But I know that it must have been out of doors, for I remember the roses and how the sun was slanting madly in every direction and butterflies were vanishing against the blue.

And when it was over and we sat in the gracious afternoon talking joyously of what had happened and of how strangely it was come about and of how heavenly sweet the world is, there came Nichola from the house bearing to the table in the little arbour a tray unmistakably laden with her cream sherbet and with mounds of her delicate cake.

"Nichola!" I cried as I hurried to her. "You *did* make it?"

Nichola looked at me from her little deep eyes.

"I made it, yes," she said, "an' that was why I went for the minister. I'd begun it, an' I wasn't going to have it wasted. It would not be holy."

It is true that Nichola can use the same argument on both sides of a question. But I have never been able to see the slightest objection to that if only the question is settled properly at last.

XVI

"SO THE CARPENTER ENCOURAGED THE GOLDSMITH"

THEY were all to spend Christmas eve with us, our nearest and dearest. On Christmas day even the kinfolk farthest removed, both as to kin and to kind, have a right by virtue of red holly to one's companionship. But Christmas eve is for the meeting of one's dearest and they had all been summoned to our house: The Chartres, the Cleatams, Miss Willie Lillieblade, Hobart Eddy, Avis and Lawrence, and Enid and David and the baby. As for Viola and Our Telephone and Lisa and Eric they were all in Naples and I dare say looking in each other's eyes as if Vesuvius were a mere hill.

There was to be with us one other — Eunice Wells, who was lame. She was in New York on the pleasant business of receiving a considerable legacy from a relative, a friend of ours, whose will, though Eunice had previously been unknown to Pelleas and me, endeared her to us.

"To my beloved niece, Eunice Wells," the testament went, "I give and bequeath This and That for

her piety, her love of learning and her incomparable courage in bearing sorrow."

Was not that the living May breathing in a rigid and word-bound instrument of the law? And what a picture of Eunice Wells. Pelleas and I had sought her out, welcomed her, and bidden her on Christmas eve to dine with us alone and to grace our merry evening.

At five o'clock on the day before Christmas, just as Pelleas and I rested from holly hanging and were longing for our tea, Hobart Eddy was announced. I say "announced" because we usually construe Nichola's smile at our drawing-room door to mean Hobart Eddy. She smiles for few but to Hobart she is openly complaisant, unfolding from the leather of her cheek an expression of real benignity.

"How very jolly you look," he said, as we sat in the ingle. "Holly over the blindfold Hope and down the curtains and, as I live, mistletoe on the sconces. Aunt Etarre, I shall kiss you from sconce to sconce."

"Do," said I; "of late Pelleas is grown appallingly confident of my single-minded regard."

"Alas," Hobart said, "nobody wants to kiss me for myself alone."

On which he put back his head and sat looking up at the blindfold Hope, wreathed with holly. And his fine, square chin without threat of dimple, and his splendid, clear-cut face, and his hand drooping

a little from the arm of his chair sent me back to my old persistent hope. Heaven had manifestly intended him to be a Young Husband. He of all men should have been sitting before his own hearth of holly and later making ready the morrow's Yule-tree for such little hearts as adore Yule-trees. . . .

Suddenly Hobart Eddy looked over at us and, "I say, you know," he said, "what *do* you think it is all for?"

"The holly?" Pelleas asked unsuspectingly.

"The mistletoe?" I hazarded.

"No, no," said Hobart Eddy with simplicity, "everything."

Pelleas and I looked at each other almost guiltily. Here were we two, always standing up for life and promising others that it would yield good things; and yet what in the world could we say to that question of Hobart's, fairly general though it is: "What is it all for?"

Pelleas spoke first, as became the more philosophical.

"It's to do one's best, wouldn't one say?" he said, "and to let the rest go."

"Ah, yes, I see," said Hobart Eddy, talking the primal things in his trim staccato, "but it's so deuced unnatural not to know *why*."

"Yes," Pelleas admitted, "yes, it is unnatural.

But when one does one's worst it gets more unnatural than ever."

Hobart Eddy looked critically at the fire.

"But, Good Lord," he said helplessly, "suppose — suppose a black beetle argues that way, and does his best, and lives to a good old beetle age. And suppose another black beetle gives up in the beginning, and takes some morphine-for-beetles, and next minute gets crushed by a watering cart. What then?"

"But I," said Pelleas with admirable dignity, "am not a beetle."

"But confound it, sir," Hobart said, "I'm afraid I am. That's the difference."

"All philosophical arguments," Pelleas observed, wrinkling the corners of his eyes, "end that way. But beetles or not, doing one's best is the only way out."

"But the 'best' of a beetle —" Hobart shrugged.

Then I spoke out with conviction.

"You, for example, Hobart Eddy," I said, "would be a perfect husband."

"Thanks, dear heart," he replied, "it's a common virtue, that."

"It's very uncommon," I protested stoutly; "I can think of no one besides Pelleas and you and Wilfred and Horace and Lawrence and David and Our Telephone and Eric who in the least possess it. Hobart Eddy, if you would marry —"

"Don't tell me, Aunt Etarre," he said, "that a married beetle is in the scheme of things any nearer the solution than a single one. Besides —" he added and stopped. I had noted, when we were on this not infrequent subject, that he was wont to say this, and stop; and when he did so my heart always went a thought faster than my reason: What if he did love some one of whom we had never guessed? But that I dismissed as absurd; for in that case, how should she not love him?

"You were meant by heaven to be a husband," I muttered, unconvinced, "you look at a picture on the wall as if you were saying: 'How are you to-day, dear?'"

"But even if one does one's best, as you say," Hobart went on, "it's the being beaten in the end that annoys me. I hate the certainty of being beaten in the end. I can throw it off now I'm young — comparatively young. But look at 'em pile up: Failures, humiliations, estrangements, the beastly little stabs at you, your own cursed mistakes — why, one is beaten in the beginning, for that matter. When you're young, even a little young, you don't know that. But as you get older, even supposing you do your best, you know you're beaten. It's deuced unsportsmanlike of somebody."

I looked at Pelleas with the glance that means an

alarm, for something to be done at once. He knew; and he did quite what I had hoped.

"We are more than seventy," Pelleas said serenely, "and *we're* not beaten."

"But you —" Hobart protested, "you've had half the world at your feet. You've won everything. You've been . . ." and so on, in his choicest social hyperbole.

"Hobart," Pelleas said, "Etarre and I have been married for fifty years. In that time we have lost, year after year, both hopes and realities. I have seen my work harshly criticized and even justly rejected. One year we had hardly a centime to pay Nichola. As it is, we escape from each day by way of the dark for fear the next will find us penniless. We lost — we need not speak of that, but you know how our little boy — my son — died before his first birthday. O, do you think . . . The sorrows, the estrangements, the failures, the ill-health, the little stabs at us, above all the cursed mistakes of my own — do you think we have not had these? Do you think we don't know, Hobart? Do you think we haven't paid, to the last farthing? Good God!" said Pelleas. "And yet we are not beaten. And we never shall be beaten, dead or alive. And without defiance. Without defiance."

"No," said I, nodding with all my might, "never

beaten. Except for a little at a time when it hurts most. But never beaten."

"How, though?" Hobart said helplessly, "I say, how do you do it, you know?"

"Well, you see," Pelleas answered gravely, "I don't know much about myself. One doesn't know. I don't know where I stop and where The Rest Of It begins. I stop somewhere, I dare say — my consciousness and all that must stop somewhere. But I've never found the last of me. I've always felt as if I were working along with a few sets of faculties when I've really got no end of them. And I don't know where these stop. Perhaps they don't stop at all. And so when I get a knock-down blow I fall all of a heap — that is, *as much of me as I know about* falls. That much of me may be beaten. But not the rest. And then I reach up a hand to the rest of me that I don't know about and I say: 'But there's all that strength left that I don't know yet. And I don't know where that stops. I've never found out that it stops at all. It is infinite strength and I can use it and be it when I like.' Beaten?" said Pelleas; "I can no more be beaten than I can be smothered in the open air. That strength is exhaustless, like the air. And nothing can shut it out — nothing."

"Not even your own mistakes? Not even irreparable loss?" said Hobart.

"No," Pelleas said, "those are hardest. But not even those."

O, I could not have loved him if he had talked to Hobart about resignation and rewards. Yet perhaps to some these are another language for victory — I do not know.

"Isn't that better," Pelleas demanded, "than taking morphine-for-beetles? Besides, after a while you learn what that Other Strength is. You learn Who it is. And how near that Someone is. But not always at first — not at first."

"But alone . . . one is so deucedly alone . . ." said Hobart uncertainly.

"Of course," Pelleas said, "we need an amazing lot of little human cheerings-up. The part of us with which we are acquainted has to be cheered up somewhat. Well, and isn't it — isn't it? Look at the charming things that are always happening! And these help one to believe right and left."

I hardly heard Nichola come in with the tea. Hobart absently took the heavy tray from her and then, while she arranged it: —

"But in the last analysis," he said, "you've got to dig your way out of things alone, haven't you? Nobody can help you."

"No!" Pelleas cried, "no, you have not. Not when you learn Who the strength is. . . ."

But with that my attention wandered from Pelleas

to Nichola. My Royal Sèvres always looks so surprised at Nichola's brown hands upon it that I have long expected it to rebuke her for familiarity. And if it had done so at that moment I could have been no more amazed than to see Nichola, still bent above the tray, rest her hands on her knees and look sidewise and inquiringly at Hobart Eddy.

"What nonsense, anyway," Pelleas was saying, "every one can help every one else no end. It's not in the big lonely fights that we can help much — but it's in the little human cheerings-up. When we get strength the next thing to do is to give it. Beetles or not — it's merely a point of moral etiquette to do that!"

"Ah, but," Hobart said, smiling, unconscious of Nichola's little eyes immovably fixed on his face, "but when they reach you out a hand people usually pinch by instinct instead of patting."

At that Nichola's little quick-lidded eyes began to wink, brows lifting. And, still leaning hands on knees: —

"Yah!" she said, "none of what you say is so."

Nichola employs the indirect method about as habitually as do thunder and lightning. And in this directness of hers Hobart, that master of feint and parry, delights.

"No, Nichola?" he said, smiling, "no?"

She got stiffly erect, drawing her hands up her apron to her thighs, her eyes winking so fast that I marvel she could see at all.

"But the whole world helps along," she said shrilly, "or else we should tear each other's eyes out. What do I do, me? I do not put fruit peel in the waste paper to worrit the ragman. I do not put potato jackets in the stove to worrit the ashman. I do not burn the bones because I think of the next poor dog. What crumbs are left I lay always, always on the back fence for the birds. I kill no living thing but spiders — which the devil made. Our Lady knows I do very little. But if I was the men with pockets on I'd find a way! I'd find a way, me," said Nichola, wagging her old gray head.

"Pockets?" Hobart repeated, puzzled.

"For the love of heaven, yes!" Nichola cried. "Pockets — money — give!" she illustrated in pantomime. "What can I do? On Thursday nights I take what sweets are in this house, what flowers are on all the plants, and I carry them to a hospital I know. If you could see how they wait for me on the beds! What can I do? The good God gave me almost no pockets. It is as he says," she nodded to Pelleas, "*Helping is why.* Yah! None of what you say is so. Mem, I didn't get no time to frost the nutcakes."

"It doesn't matter, Nichola — it doesn't matter,"

said I, holding hard to the arms of my chair. So that was where she went on her Thursday nights out . . . so that was where the occasional blossoms on my plants . . .

"I dare say you're right, you know, Nichola," Hobart was saying gravely.

She was almost out of the room but she turned, rolling her hands in her apron.

"Since Bible days I was right," she said, and leaning forward, nodding her head at every word, to the utter amazement of Pelleas and me: "'*They helped everybody his neighbour,*'" she quoted freely, "'*and everybody said to his brother, "You be of good courage." So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith; and the one that smoothed with the hammer, him that smote with the anvil.' Che!*" she cried; "you must start in that way and then some good will come. Do I not know? Some good will come, I say. It never, never fails."

"Right, Nichola," said Hobart, still gravely, "I haven't a doubt of what you say."

"The tea's all gettin' cold," she added indifferently as she went between the curtains.

"Nichola and I," Pelleas said in distress, "throw in our opinions with the tea, Hobart. They don't come extra." But he was smiling and so was Hobart and so was I, with my inevitable tear.

The next instant Nichola was at the portières again.

"The leddy with canaries in her head is in the lib'ry," she said.

"*Canaries*, Nichola?" I echoed.

"It's the truth!" she proclaimed, "the one with canaries singin' in her head till it shows through," and instantly she vanished.

"Whom can she mean?" said I helplessly. For I have no acquaintance who has a bird shop though I have always thought that bird-shop proprietors must be charming people.

"It's probably somebody with parrots on her bonnet," Hobart suggested helpfully.

I hurried across the hall, noting how the holly wreaths showed bright in the mirrors as if the pleasantest things were about to happen. For in dim light a mirror does not merely photograph. It becomes the artist and suggests. And a mirror wreathed with holly on the day before Christmas is no more like an ordinary mirror than an ordinary woman is like a bride.

This thought was in my mind as I entered the library and found Eunice Wells, whose "piety and love of learning and incomparable courage in bearing sorrow" had drawn her to us no more than had her helplessness and her charm. And suddenly I understood that there are some women who seem always like brides, moving in an atmosphere apart, having something of joy and something of wistfulness.

With Eunice the joy was paramount so that I knew now what Nichola had meant by the "canaries singing in her head till it shows through." But my heart smote me, for it seemed to me that that joy was a flower of renunciation instead of the flower of youth. And how should it be otherwise? For there beside her chair lay her crutch.

"Ah," I cried, "you are just in time, my dear, for a cup of tea and a nutcake with no frosting. And Merry Christmas — Merry Christmas!"

I shall not soon forget her as she looked lying back in Pelleas' big chair, all the beauty of her face visible, hidden by no mask of mood; and in her cheek a dimple like the last loving touch in the drawing of her. I had never seen an invalid with a dimple and some way that dimple seemed to link her with life.

"Besides," I continued, "I've a friend whom I want you to meet — a man, a youngish man — O, a Merry-Christmas-and-holly-man, to whom I am devoted. Come in as you are — the tea ruins itself!"

"Ah, please," Eunice begged at this, "will you forgive me if I sit here instead while you go back to your guest? I would far rather be here and not talk to — to strangers. You will not mind?"

"Do quite as you like, dear child," I replied, for

this atrocious ethics is the only proper motto for every hostess.

So, her wraps having been put aside, I made her comfortable by the fire with magazines, and a Christmas rose in a vase. And I went away in a kind of misery; for here was one for whom with all my ardour I could plan nothing. Her little crutch would bar the way to any future of brightness. I had a swift sense of the mockery that Christmas holly may be.

"I amuse myself with nutcakes, me," said Hobart Eddy as I entered the drawing-room, "and where, pray, is the Canary Lady?"

"She is a very fragile Canary Lady," I answered sadly; "she is lame, you know, Hobart."

"And has she no tea?" he demanded.

"She was too tired to join us," I explained; "Pelleas will take her cup to her when Nichola brings the hot water."

"Let me take it to her," Hobart suggested when Nichola came in with the hot-water pot. "I won't stay," he promised as I hesitated, "and do let me be useful. I can't look out for the emotions of the ashman and the next poor dog, but I want to help. *Helping is why*," he smiled at Nichola.

"You must forgive Nichola and me our trespasses," Pelleas murmured uneasily.

"Forgive them? I'm going to practice them,"

Hobart said, rising; "I'm going to take tea and a nut-cake to the Canary Lady in the library and cheer her up, carpenter to goldsmith."

"Well, then," said I, since "Do quite as you like" is the proper motto for every hostess, "do so. But mind that you do not stay *at all*."

Nichola brought the little silver card tray from the hall, and about the plate of cakes and the fragrant cup I laid a spray or two of holly.

> "Heigh ho! sing, heigh ho! unto the green holly:
> Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:"

Hobart hummed as he moved away.

"Fancy rhyming 'holly' with such a sentiment!" I cried after him.

Nichola stood nodding her head.

"*Che!*" she said, "I said a word to him about the universe. *He* understood. Some good will come."

She went away muttering and Pelleas and I changed eyes.

"Pelleas," I said wonderingly, "she has ideas!"

We had already surprised her in an emotion or two; but of course ideas are another matter.

"More and more," Pelleas said meditatively, "I suspect people of ideas. They seem sometimes to have ideas when they have no minds. I dare say they are acted on by emanations."

"But, Pelleas," I said, "think of old Nichola going alone to that hospital on her Thursday even-

ings. Think of her understanding that *Helping is why*, and quoting from Isaiah!"

"She believes," Pelleas meditated, "that our sun is the largest body in all the systems and that our moon is next in size. But for all that she knows *Helping is why*. That the carpenter must encourage the goldsmith. Yes, Nichola must be acted on by emanations."

We sat silent for a little. Then,

"Do you remember," I asked irrelevantly — but I am not sure that there is such a thing as irrelevance — "how you insisted that every one in the world who is worth anything loves some one as much as we do, or else expects to do so, or else is unhappy because the love went wrong?"

"And it's true," said Pelleas.

"For all but Hobart," I assented; "it was true for Miss Willie and for Nichola. But not for Hobart. And I have been wondering how any one who is not in love can live through a Christmas without falling in love. Christmas seems a kind of loving-cup of days."

"*We* should sing it," Pelleas suggested,

> "Heigh ho! sing, heigh ho! unto the green holly:
> High love is high wisdom, to love not is folly:"

"That is the way it really is," said I comfortably; and then I woke to the other realities. "Pelleas," I cried, "where is Hobart?"

Where was Hobart Eddy indeed? It was quite ten minutes since he had gone with the Canary Lady's cup, and I had charged him not to stay *at all*.

"Really," I said, "we must go after him. This is too bad of him, too — I can't forgive myself. Let us go after him, Pelleas."

I took the little hot-water pot for an excuse and we went across the hall.

"Heigh ho! sing, heigh ho! unto the green holly:
High love is high wisdom, to love not is folly:
Then, heigh ho! the holly!
This life is most jolly."

Pelleas hummed the whole way.

The library door was ajar and we entered together. Do you think that we did not feel the bewilderment of gods and men when we saw, in the firelight, Hobart Eddy with Eunice Wells in his arms?

I hugged my little hot-water pot and could find no words as they turned and saw us. But ah, Hobart Eddy's face! I say to every one that it was transfigured, like the face of one who has found the secret of the days. And as for dear Eunice — but then, had not I, who am a most discerning old woman, already comprehended that Eunice had looked like a bride from the beginning?

"Aunt Etarre!" cried Hobart Eddy like a boy, "I've found her again. I've found her!"

I clasped Pelleas' arm while I tried to understand.

We who had despaired of contriving for Hobart Eddy a concrete romance, were we to gather that this was love at first sight, on our hearth-rug? Even we have never officiated at anything so spectacular as love at first sight. But my mind caught and clung to that "again."

"'Again'?" I echoed it.

"I have loved her for years," Hobart said; "she was to have been my wife. And she went away, went without a word, so that I couldn't trace her, and why do you think she did that? Because the lameness came — and she never let me know."

"It wasn't . . . I thought . . . O, I ought not now . . ." Eunice cried, "but not because I don't care. O, never that!"

On which, "Hobart Eddy! Eunice!" I uttered. "Like a Young Husband, you know — didn't I say so? Haven't I always said so? Pelleas, you see the rule does apply to Hobart too! And I thought of a bride at once, at once and then that dimple — O," said I, "I don't know in the least what I'm talking about — at least you don't know. But I don't care, because I'm so glad."

"You dear fairy godpeople," Hobart Eddy said in the midst of his happiness, "you told me charming things were always happening!"

"To help us to believe," I heard Pelleas saying to himself.

O, I wish that we two had had more to do in bringing it all about. As it was I was very thankful that it proved not to be love at first sight, for I would see one's love, like one's bonnets, chosen with a fine deliberation. But about this affair there had been the most sorrowful deliberation. Pelleas and I sat on the sofa before them and they told us a fragment here and a fragment there and joy over all. Hobart Eddy had met her years before in her little New England town. His wooing had been brief and, because of an aunt who knew what it was to be an ogre, nearly secret. Week by week through one Spring he had gone to see Eunice, and then had come her ugly fall from her saddle of which until now he had never known; for when she understood that the lameness was likely to be incurable she and that disgustingly willing aunt had simply disappeared and left no trace at all.

"What else could I do?" Eunice appealed to us simply; "I loved him . . . how could I let him sacrifice his life to me . . . a cripple? Aunt Lydia said he would forget. I had no home; we were staying here and there for Aunt Lydia's health; and to leave no trace was easy. What else could I do?"

"O," Hobart Eddy said only, "Eunice, Eunice!"

There was that in his voice which made Pelleas and me look at him in the happiest wonder. And I

remembered that other note in his voice that day in the orchard with Enid's baby. In the statue story Pelleas and I have never believed that Galatea came to life alone. For we think that the Pygmalions have an awakening not less sacred.

I do not in the least remember how Pelleas and I got out of the room. I do remember that we two stood in the middle of our drawing-room looking at each other, speechless with the marvel of what had come. No wonder that the blindfold Hope over the mantel had wreathed herself in holly!

It was late when Hobart hurried home to dress and it was later still when we four had dinner which I do not recall that any of us ate. And then Pelleas and I left those two in the library in the presence of their forgotten coffee while we flew distractedly about giving last touches for our party, an event which had all but slipped our minds.

"Pelleas," said I, lighting candles, "think how we planned that Hobart's wife must be a woman of the world!"

"But Eunice," Pelleas said, "is a woman of many worlds."

Our shabby drawing-room was ablaze with red candles; and what with holly red on the walls and the snow banking the casements and bells jingling up and down the avenue, the sense of Christmas was very real. For me, Christmas seems always to

be just past or else on the way; and that sixth sense of Christmas being actually *Now* is thrice desirable.

On the stroke of nine we two, waiting before the fire, heard Nichola on the basement stairs; and by the way in which she mounted, with labor and caution, I knew that she was bringing the punch. We had wished to have it ready — that harmless steaming punch compounded from my mother's recipe — when our guests arrived, so that they should first of all hear the news and drink health to Eunice and Hobart.

Nichola was splendid in her scarlet merino and that vast cap effect managed by a starched pillow-case and a bit of string, and over her arm hung a huge holly wreath for the bowl's brim. When she had deposited her fragrant burden and laid the wreath in place she stood erect and looked at us solemnly for a moment, and then her face wrinkled in all directions and was lighted with her rare, puckered smile.

"Mer — ry Christmas!" she said.

"Merry Christmas, Nichola!" we cried, and I think that in all her years with us we had never before heard the words upon her lips.

"Who goes ridin' behind the sleigh-bells to-night?" she asked then abruptly.

"*Who* rides?" I repeated, puzzled.

"Yes," Nichola said; "this is a night when all folk stay home. The whole world sits by the fire on

Christmas night. An' yet the sleigh-bells ring like mad. It is not holy."

Pelleas and I had never thought of that. But there may be something in it. Who indeed, when all the world keeps hearth-holiday, who is it that rides abroad on Christmas night behind the bells?

"Good spirits, perhaps, Nichola," Pelleas said, smiling.

"I do not doubt it," Nichola declared gravely; "that is not holy either — to doubt."

"No," we said, "to doubt good spirits is never holy."

On this we heard the summons at our door, and Nichola went off to answer it. And in came all our guests at once from dinner at the Chartres'; and at Nichola's bidding they hastened straight to the drawing-room and cried their Christmas greetings to Pelleas and me, who stood serving the steaming punch before the fireplace.

They were all there: Madame Sally in black velvet and a diamond or two; Polly Cleatam with — as I live! — a new dimple; and Wilfred and Horace acting as if Christmas were the only day on the business calendar; Miss Willie Lillieblade, taking a Christmas capsule from the head of her white staff; Avis and Lawrence, always dangerously likely to be found conferring in quiet corners; and Enid and David and the baby — we had insisted on the

baby and he had arrived, in a cocoon of Valenciennes. And when the glasses had been handed round, Pelleas slipped across the hall to the library and reappeared among us with Eunice and Hobart.

"Dear, dear friends," Pelleas said, "dear friends . . ."

But one look in the faces of those three was enough. And I, an incarnate confirmation, stood on the hearth-rug nodding with all my might.

I cannot tell you how merry we were in that moment or how in love with life. I cannot recall what tender, broken words were said or what toasts were drunk. But I remember well enough the faces of Eunice and Hobart Eddy; and I think that the holly-wreathed mirrors must have found it difficult to play the artist and suggest, because that which they had merely to reflect was so much more luminous.

In the midst of all, Nichola, bringing more glasses, spoke at my elbow.

"Mem," she asked, "air them two goin' to get marrit?"

"Yes, Nichola," I said, "yes, they are. They are!"

Nichola stood looking at me and winking fast, as if the air were filled with dust. And then came that curious change in her face which I had seen there before: a look as if her features were momentarily out of drawing, by way of bodying forth some unwonted thought.

"I made that match," Nichola acknowledged briefly.

"Nichola!" I said in bewilderment.

"It's so," she maintained solemnly; "didn't I say a word to him this afternoon — a word about the universe? He begun to understand how to act. For the love of heaven, did I not *say* some good would come?"

"You did say so, Nichola," I answered, "and certainly the good has come."

"*Che!*" said Nichola, nodding her head, "I am sure about all things, me."

I turned to Pelleas, longing to tell him that we were finding the end of one rainbow after another. And Pelleas was at that moment lifting his glass.

"Here's to Christmas," he cried as he met my eyes, "the loving cup of days!"

XVII

CHRISTMAS ROSES

WHEN our guests were gone Pelleas and I sat for some while beside the drawing-room fire. They had brought us a box of Christmas roses and these made sweet the room as if with a secret Spring — a Little Spring, such as comes to us all, now and then, through the year. And it was the enchanted hour, when Christmas eve has just passed and no one is yet awakened by the universal note of Get-Your-Stocking-Before-Breakfast.

"For that matter," Pelleas said, "every day is a loving cup, only some of us see only one of its handles: Our own."

And after a time: —

"Isn't there a legend," he wanted to know, "or if there isn't one there ought to be one, that the first flowers were Christmas roses and that you can detect their odour in all other flowers? I'm not sure," he warmed to the subject, "but that they say if you look steadily, with clear eyes, you can see all about every flower many little lines, in the shape of a Christmas rose!"

Of course nothing beautiful is difficult to believe.

Even in the windows of the great florists, where the dear flowers pose as if for their portraits, we think that one looking closely through the glass may see in their faces the spirit of the Christmas roses. And when the flowers are made a gift of love the spirit is set free. Who knows? Perhaps the gracious little spirit is in us all, waiting for its liberty in our best gifts.

And at thought of gifts I said, on Christmas eve of all times, what had been for some time in my heart: —

"Pelleas, we ought — we really ought, you know, to make a new will."

The word casts a veritable shadow on the page as I write it. Pelleas, conscious of the same shadow, moved and frowned.

"But why, Etarre?" he asked; "I had an uncle who lived to be ninety."

"So will you," I said, "and still —"

"He began translating Theocritus at ninety," Pelleas continued convincingly.

"I'll venture he had made his will by then, though," said I.

"Is that any reason why I should make mine?" Pelleas demanded. "I *never* did the things my family did."

"Like living until ninety?" I murmured.

O, I could not love Pelleas if he was never unreasonable. It seems to me that the privilege of

unreason is one of the gifts of marriage; and when I hear The Married chiding each other for the exercise of this gift I long to cry: Is it not tiresome enough in all conscience to have to keep up a brave show of reason for one's friends, without wearing a uniform of logic in private? Laugh at each other's unreason for your pastime, and Heaven bless you!

Pelleas can do more than this: He can laugh at his own unreason. And when he had done so:—

"Ah, well, I know we ought," he admitted, "but I do so object to the literary style of wills."

It has long been a sadness of ours that the law makes all the poor dead talk alike in this last office of the human pleasure, so that cartman and potentate and philosopher give away their chattels to the same dreary choice of forms. No matter with what charming propriety they have in life written little letters to accompany gifts, most sensitively shading the temper of bestowal, yet in the majesty of their passing they are forced into a very strait-jacket of phrasing so that verily, to bequeath a thing to one's friend is well-nigh to throw it at him. Yes, one of the drawbacks to dying is the diction of wills.

Pelleas meditated for a moment and then laughed out.

"Telegrams," said he, "are such a social convenience in life that I don't see why they don't extend their function. Then all we should need would be

two witnesses, ready for anything, and some yellow telegraph blanks, and a lawyer to file the messages whenever we should die, telling all our friends what we wish them to have."

At once we fell planning the telegrams, quite as if the Eye of the Law knew what it is to wrinkle at the corners.

As,

MRS. LAWRENCE KNIGHT,
Little Rosemont,
L.I.

I wish you to have my mother's pearls and her mahogany and my Samarcand rug and my Langhorne Plutarch and a kiss.

AUNT ETARRE.

and

MR. ERIC CHARTRES
To His Club,

Come to the house and get the Royal Sèvres tea-service on which you and Lisa had your first tea together and a check made out to you in my check book in the library table drawer.

UNCLE PELLEAS.

And so on, with the witnesses' names properly in the corners.

"Perfect," said I with enthusiasm. "O, Pelleas, let us get a bill through to this effect."

"But we may live to be only ninety, you know," he reminded me.

We went to the window, presently, and threw it open on the chance of hearing the bird of dawning

singing all night long in the Park, which is of course, in New York, where it sings on Star of Bethlehem night. We did not hear it, but it is something to have been certain that it was there. And as we closed the casement,

"After all," Pelleas said seriously, "the Telegraph Will Bill would have to do only with property. And a will ought to be concerned with soberer matters."

So it ought, in spite of its dress of diction, rather like the motley.

"A man," Pelleas continued, "ought to have something more important to will away than his house and his watch and his best bed. A man's poor soul, now — unless he is an artist, which he probably is not — has no chance verbally to leave anybody anything."

"It makes its will every day," said I.

"Even so," Pelleas contended, "it ought to die rich if it's anything of a soul."

And that is true enough.

"Suppose," Pelleas suggested, "the telegrams were to contain something like this: 'And from my spirit to yours I bequeath the hard-won knowledge that you must be true from the beginning. But if by any chance you have not been so, then you must be true from the moment that you know.' Why not?"

Why not, indeed?

"I think that would be mine to give," Pelleas

said reflectively; "and what would yours be, Etarre?" he asked.

At that I fell in sudden abashment. What could I say? What would I will my poor life to mean to any one who chances to know that I have lived at all? O, I dare say I should have been able to formulate many a fine-sounding phrase about the passion for perfection, but confronted with the necessity I could think of nothing save a few straggling truths.

"I don't know," said I uncertainly; "I am sure of so little, save self-giving. I should like to bequeath some knowledge of the magic of self-giving. Now Nichola," I hazarded, to evade the matter, "would no doubt say: 'And from my soul to your soul this word about the universe: *Helping is why.*'"

"But you — you, Etarre," Pelleas persisted; "what would the real You will to others, in this mortuary telegram?"

And as I looked at him I knew.

"O, Pelleas," I said, "I think I would telegraph to every one: 'From my spirit to your spirit, some understanding of the preciousness of love. And the need to keep it true.'"

I shall always remember with what gladness he turned to me. I wished that his smile and our bright hearth and our Christmas roses might bless every one.

"I wanted you to say that," said Pelleas.

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